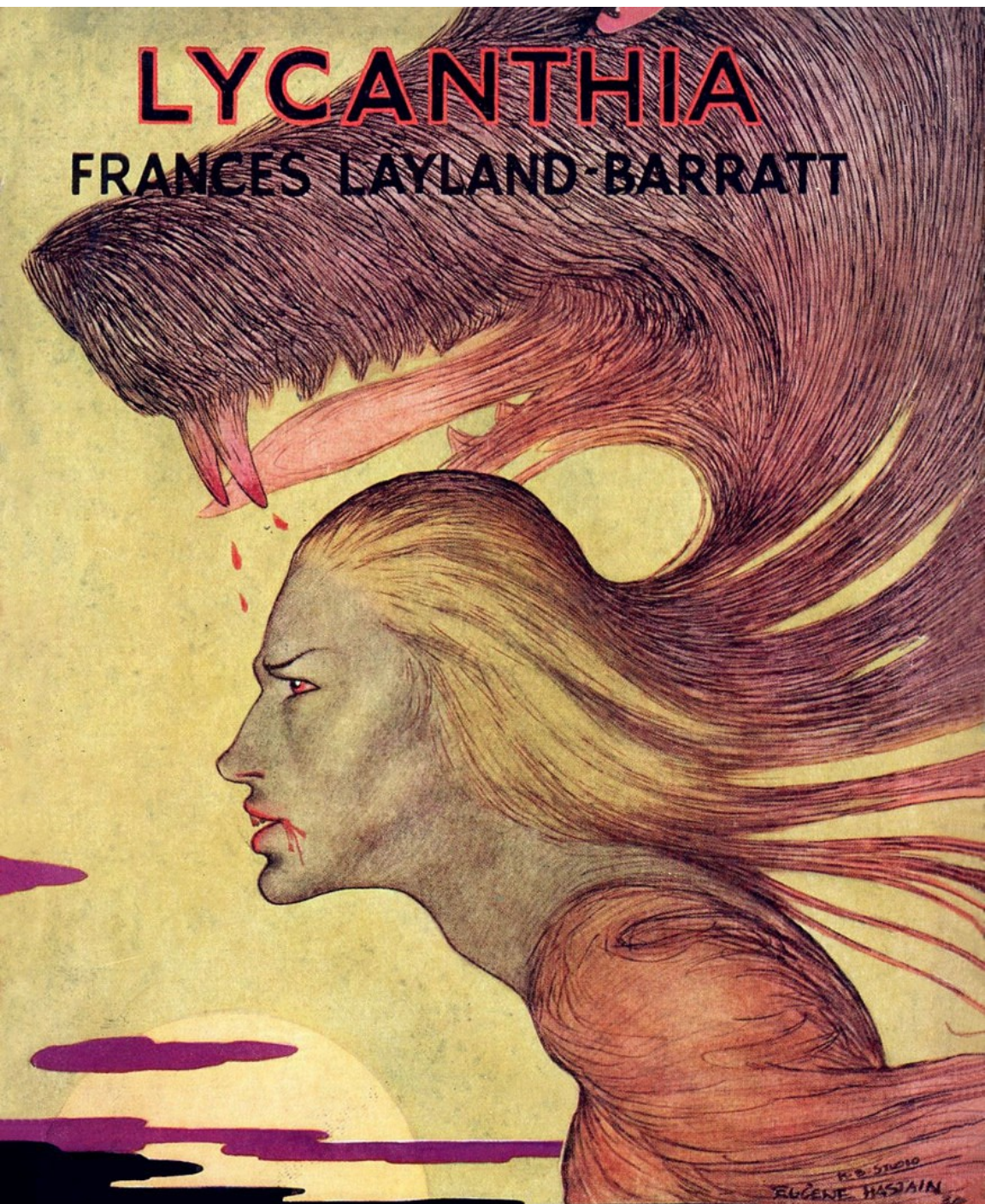


# LYCANTHIA

FRANCES LAYLAND-BARRATT



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LYCANTHIA THE WOLF !  
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## **Lycanthia**

By

Frances Layland Barratt

Published 1935

## WHAT THIS STORY IS ABOUT

Here is a bizarre story—something that will appeal to lovers of the macabre. It tells of Lycanthia, the orphan child of a Polish nobleman and an English mother, who was brought up by a servant in an atmosphere of strange satanic rites and mysticism.

They come to England accompanied by a huge wolf-like dog, where their secret practices of vampirism awaken the distrust of their neighbours. Then comes a reign of terror in which a great wolf-like creature prowls the country-side, savaging beasts and terrifying the inhabitants. All efforts to shoot the marauder fail until finally a lucky bullet, though finding its mark, serves only to deepen the mystery. In “Lycanthia” Frances Layland-Barratt has produced one of the most eerie stories of modern times.

# LYCANTHIA

BY  
F. LAYLAND BARRATT

HERBERT JENKINS LIMITED  
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“Many self-styled occultists...are unable to understand the difference between Psychism, the path of power which is finite, and the spiritual journey, the path of reality, which is permanent.”

V. Dane.

*All the characters in this story are imaginary,  
and have no relation to any person.*

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“Katie King,” etc., by Sir William Crookes.

Oh! ye immortal Gods! what is Theogony?  
Oh! thou, too, mortal man! what is Philosophy?  
Oh! World, which was and is, what is Cosmogony?  
Some people have accused me of Misanthropy;  
And yet I know no more than the mahogany  
That forms this desk, of what they mean;—Lycanthropy  
I comprehend, for without transformation  
Men become wolves on any slight occasion.”

BYRON: “Don Juan,” Canto IX, 20.

# LYCANTHIA

## CHAPTER I

### THE PITH OF THE STORY

**I**N eighteen hundred and forty-eight, the northeastern division of Scalby in Yorkshire was represented in the House of Commons by Mr. Sylvester Mortimer-Beltane of Scalby Castle.

He married Lady Julia Fitz-Claude, daughter of the Earl of Westhaughton, and during the ten years of their lives together, she produced three daughters, Julia and Camilla—twins, and, seven years later, one who was baptized Pauline a few hours before Lady Julia's death.

When Pauline was ten years old, Mr. Mortimer-Beltane moved his family and household to a mansion he purchased at Hampstead; commodious and attractive, known as Belit Place, between the old hostelry, The Spaniard's Inn, and Lord Montfort's estate. This house was demolished in 1900 when so many changes were made in the most beautiful of the London suburbs, but during its occupation by Mr. Mortimer-Beltane it became the centre of lavish hospitality extended to Members of both Houses and the diplomatic accredited representatives from the European countries.

After her presentation at one of Queen Victoria's Drawing-rooms by her aunt, the Countess of Westhaughton, Julia Mortimer-Beltane became her father's

hostess, at an age most girls were subjected to the rigid supervision of a chaperon.

Tall, fair and graceful, her girlish charms rapidly assumed a dignity attracting the notice of many eligible men ambitious to secure a wife likely to further their social requirements. Her twin sister, by her earnest entreaties, was not introduced to society until the following year, and six months later married her second cousin, Sir Horace Watts, and went to live contentedly with him on his Cumberland estate, seldom revisiting her father's Hampstead home.

At a reception at the Foreign Office, Julia MortimerBeltane met the man who was to influence her life more profoundly than any except her father.

Count Sigismund Casimir Kritzulesco, military attaché at the Octrian Embassy, standing near the head of the Grand Staircase among those diplomats who made it their vantage point to observe the Foreign Secretary's guests, was instantly attracted to the tall, fair-haired young woman following her father up the wide staircase.

That evening Julia wore a pale lemon watered taffeta gown, the bodice and sleeves profusely trimmed with silver lace and fringe. Over her shoulders lay a soft-tinted magenta scarf, a twisted band of magenta and silver gauze in her hair.

Sigismund Kritzulesco had met most of the beautiful women in Europe whose privilege it was to live in royal and diplomatic circles, but none had created in his regard more than a fleeting interest. At the age of forty-two, when the hot blood of a headstrong youth might be expected to have passed the ebullient period of passion, he plunged without intention into its vast gulf. An

Octrian by birth, mixed blood set him apart from the genial courtesy of his father's people.

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His hot blood, an heritage from his Polish mother, before her marriage Princess Marie Jablonowski, carried with it the taint of vicious tendencies, seldom found in men of English race.

An introduction to Miss Mortimer-Beltane was easily secured, and from that moment Count Kritzulesco pursued his suit with the intensity of his Germanic-Slav nature and the ardour of a man approaching middle-age, whose outlook into his future warned him its horizon was not as distant as that of a youth of twenty.

From the beginning of the acquaintance Julia was repelled. She admitted to those of her relations who perceived the earnest attentions of her foreign admirer were tendings towards matrimony that Kritzulesco was handsome, distinguished in appearance, and courtly in manner. Her father informed himself the Count was a man of fortune in Octria and Poland; the Octrian Ambassador knew members of his family and avowed himself an admirer of his diplomatic gifts, which should open to him the highest posts his country had to offer.

These facts he brought to his daughter's notice one Sunday evening after dinner. Julia listened dutifully.

"I do not wish to marry, sir."

Her father moved impatiently in his wide, leather writing-chair.

"It is a good position he has to offer the lady he makes his wife."

"Do you realize, father, he is a Roman Catholic?"

Mr. Mortimer-Beltane jumped.

"By Gad! Julia, I had not realized that."

“Besides, sir, has he proposed for me? He has not made me a definite offer of marriage.”

“Possibly not, yet the whole of London knows his intentions.”

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“Not quite all London, sir,” she reminded him demurely.

“Well, all of London that matters.” His voice was testy; he disliked domestic arguments.

“But,” she persisted, “even if our London knows Count Sigismund Casimir Kritzulesco does me the honour of desiring me for his wife, that is no reason why I should gratify expectations. It is I who would marry him, not our London.”

“True, true—but will you favour me, Julia, with your objections?”

“I do not love him—surely a sufficient reason.”

“But this can scarcely be termed an ordinary marriage; it becomes a matrimonial alliance.”

Her lip curled scornfully.

“Wherein is the difference? The man remains the same.”

“I see you are set against this proposal.”

“By no means, sir. How can I be set against a proposal which has not yet been made?”

“But it will be. At noon to-day, just as I got down to the House a messenger brought me this letter.” He handed the epistle across the table. “He asks for a personal interview to-morrow at twelve o’clock, and will send his own messenger for it between nine and ten in the morning.”

Julia looked gravely at the large square envelope with its blue seal, impressed with an elaborate armorial

device.

“Need I read it?” she asked.

“Not unless you wish. Its contents are brief—he asks for the interview.”

Leaning forward he knocked the cold ashes out of his pipe into a finger-bowl.

“He must be received, and heard. Any man of his social position has the right to present himself under these circumstances.”

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“But surely not when the answer must be in the negative?”

“Let him plead his own cause.” Then, changing his conciliatory tone, he said, “I must see him first, and then, if only for a few moments, it is your duty to receive him. Driving home to-day, I called in Berkeley Square to see your aunt Margaret. The Count’s request for an interview did not surprise her. She Ekes him—so does Westhaughton. She counsels consideration.”

Julia’s face gradually whitened.

“Father, do you wish me to leave your house?”

He looked at her in surprise.

“Certainly not, but my affection for you must not spoil the possibility of a good marriage.”

“Then I know what to do.”

The decision in her voice was a sufficient assurance to her father that on the morrow Count Kritzulesco would receive a refusal. The knowledge troubled him, but he saw no way of declining the interview.

Count Kritzulesco went directly to his point. His words were few, his manner formal and dignified, yet underneath this superficial calm Mr. Mortimer-Beltane sensed the turbulent emotion of a deep-seated passion.

Knowing his daughter's mind he experienced a genuine impulse of pity towards this man, desirable as a husband for a woman sympathetically inclined towards him.

"I ask much in requesting Miss Mortimer-Beltane's hand, but at least I can offer a suitable surrounding to a lady I honour above all other women."

Mr. Mortimer-Beltane interrupted hastily:

"A moment I pray, sir; my daughter is not of your religious faith, nor do I think she would entertain the idea of changing it."

Count Kritzulesco bowed.

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"Nor would I ask her. The matter can be arranged."

"I suppose you will not take the assurance from me that my daughter would be difficult to persuade to change her nationality?"

"All I ask is the favour of an interview with Miss Julia. My lawyer will, in due course, convey to yours the somewhat sordid—but necessary—material details of the marriage settlement."

Mr. Mortimer-Beltane experienced a sharp twinge of emotional discomfort. His visitor seemed too assured of success.

"How," he asked himself, "would he take refusal?"

Julia supplied the answer.

Count Kritzulesco was abhorrent to her refined English nature. She shrank from his person, his voice, and his devouringly hungry eyes. She feared his masterful individuality, and all the worldly and social advantages faded from her consideration.

"I offer you my whole affection, my complete devotion and deepest respect," he assured her. "I am



forty-two years old, and you are the only woman I have asked to be my wife.”

Julia did not doubt the truth of his declaration, but her consciousness of his sincerity produced a shrinking pity almost overwhelming.

Closely he watched her face, reading the flickering emotions as they disturbed her self-control. He knew he had neither touched her senses nor captured her heart: providing she accepted him as her husband he cared nothing for her disinclinations. Time and his unfaltering determination to bend her to his need would accomplish what now seemed impossible.

“I do not love you,” she answered him gently.

“If I am content to take the risk?”

“I never can love you,” her voice trembled with a suspicion of fear.

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“I will make you.”

“Never, never—you cannot.”

“Are your affections otherwise engaged?”

She answered him frankly.

“No; there is no other man except my father.”

“Him I do not fear.”

“Believe me it is useless.” She had need of all her strength of will to beat him back. Behind her fear and aversion lay her abhorrence for something in him she only sensed but could not define.

His eyes tried to capture her direct regard; to bore into her virgin soul the suggestion of an accomplished ravishment.

She took refuge in flight: adroitly she quitted the drawing-room, leaving him to its empty vastness and his dejected hopes.

He accepted dismissal but refused to recognize it as defeat. So formidable was the volcanic stress of himself and his emotions in Belit Place, Julia fancied herself in imminent danger from his resentment, and fled from Hampstead to the distant protection of her twin sister and fox-hunting brother-in-law in Cumberland.

The following year Pauline Mortimer-Beltane reached the “coming-out” age of eighteen and was duly presented by Lady Westhaughton at an early Drawing-room. Before the season closed she was engaged to be married to her elder sister’s erstwhile suitor, Count Sigismund Casimir Kritzulesco, showing so much determination in her choice neither her father nor her relations could dissuade her from what they considered an unnatural infatuation.

In figure, colouring and features she resembled Julia, but she had not her sister’s dignity nor her strength of character. If confirmation of her attachment to Kritzulesco had been needed by her distracted father,

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she affirmed it by embracing the Roman Catholic religion, to be in complete unision with her future husband.

Mr. Mortimer-Beltane was forced to maintain a semblance of approval at his daughter’s extraordinary marriage, but he dreaded its result.

Pauline was married in June, the usual conventional ceremony consequent on her father’s position and that of her future husband being strictly observed, but as Mr. Mortimer-Beltane led his young daughter up the steps of the Oratory at Brompton he knew she was passing out of his life as surely as though into her grave.

Puzzled dismay was, and continued to be, Julia's mental attitude from the moment she knew Kritzulesco was to be her brother-in-law. But she kept silent before Pauline.

When Kritzulesco took his young wife up to her father and sister to make their farewells before starting on the first stage of their marriage journey to Paris, he paused for a full moment over Julia's hand. Then raising his dark eyes to hers, he sent a message swiftly into her understanding, laying bare to her the underlying cause of his marriage with Pauline. "Since you disdained me," he whispered, "she must bear my children, so shall our blood mingle in their veins."

The vehemence of this threat, straight from his soul to hers froze her with horror. Her first thought was for her sister. What future would be hers with a man whose sole intention was a half-masked retaliation on her sister for her, Julia's, rejection of his suit? Many women have been wedded for a similar cause—a still greater multitude as makeshifts of convenience.

Julia realized her sister's fate was for ever beyond her control. In the contest between her will and

Kritzulesco he had won. A profitless victory without glory to gild its brutality—her sister's peace of mind its price.

To his parting revelation she made no answer. Time and place permitted neither. Possibly he had deliberately chosen the moment of his departure for his parting attack on her sisterly sensibilities, if so, he succeeded in shattering her peace of mind; not unmoved could she contemplate her young sister's helplessness in his charge. She was leaving her English relations and home

to venture forth into the distant wilds of a continental country, to live with an alien race, her only guidance the affection of her husband and the advice of the priests of her new religion.

Julia knew no tender sentiment of a conjugal nature would smooth the difficulties of Pauline's early married life. These reflections were instant; as her sister mounted the steps of the high-swung barouche in which she and Kritzulesco were to be driven from Belit Place to Victoria Station, the tears streamed down Julia's face. A show of sisterly emotion was permissible and occasioned only kindly comments from those who saw them.

Pauline never revisited her English home. A few months after his marriage Kritzulesco inherited his grandfather's Polish estate, Castle Kornenbourg, forty miles from Cracow and, retiring from the diplomatic service, he went into permanent residence in the country.

Three years later Pauline wrote to her father announcing the birth of a daughter, whose baptismal name was Lycanthia.

*. . . selected by Count Kritzulesco, but which I do not find -  
pleasing. She has pale, flaxen hair and dark*

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*eyes, but otherwise looks like an ordinary baby. I am not allowed to  
see much of her. Count Kritzulesco has engaged the wife of one of  
his foresters as the baby's foster-mother. Her own baby has been  
sent away.*

These remarks contained the substance of Pauline's news to her father. They gave no hint as to her own opinions about her infant or its upbringing. There was a negative atmosphere in the scantily written pages which made Julia catch her breath in a trepidation she forbore to analyse.

The next autumn misfortune fell upon Julia in the form of a mild attack of smallpox, which destroyed her complexion without thickening her features. It aged her: girlhood was definitely destroyed by the dread disease. Her father's fading eyesight hid from him the ravages in her beauty, nor did he connect with it Julia's tentative acceptance of the first invitation she received to visit Pauline and Count Kritzulesco at Schloss Kornenbourg.

"Surely," she told herself, "his madness has passed, and if cure be needed it would operate now when I am but the faded semblance of what I once was."

Diffidence prevented her giving her full confidence to her father. She questioned his imagining Kritzulesco's love for her could outlast his engagement to Pauline. She shrank from shocking his sense of propriety. His ideas on marriage were rigid. Yet instinct warned her to be cautious.

A provisional acceptance was sent for the late spring of the next year, but the death of Mr. Mortimer Beltane prevented Julia leaving England then. Business affairs occupied her time and attention, though both married sisters had received generous settlements on their respective marriages.

Scalby Castle being entailed passed to a cousin,

but Julia received Belit Place and a sufficient fortune to live there as during her father's lifetime.

When circumstances permitted her to consider again Pauline's invitation, the opportunity had passed. Pauline died when her young daughter was six years old, and Juba abandoned her visit to Cracow.

With the announcement of her sister's death, Count Kritzulesco sent a request for Julia to select and send to Castle Kornenbourg a suitable nursery-governess to instruct Lycanthia in English.

*Although [he wrote], your niece speaks your language better than her own as Pauline always talked to her in English. I am much from home, travelling and going to Wien, and an Englishwoman is more reliable than my own countrywomen. Lycanthia has her personal maid, Maga, who was her foster-mother, but she can only regard her little wardrobe and articles of the nursery. I rely on you to choose wisely.*

Julia chose with reluctance the desired governess; her choice proved fortunate and Miss Lynne remained in Count Kritzulesco's family until Lycanthia was seventeen years old. She died from pneumonia one severe winter, and Count Kritzulesco followed her a few weeks later, not from the same disease, but as the result of an abdominal wound caused by a wild boar's tusk when hunting in his own forests.

His last conscious act was a long letter to his English sister-in-law, written in intervals of weakness, and sealed by his lawyer after his death. As directed, the lawyer sent this letter to England in the personal charge of one of his sons.

” Our lives, our tears, as water  
Are spilled upon the ground,  
God giveth no man quarter  
Yet God a means hath found.”  
Kipling.

“Look, you have cast out Love!  
To my own gods I go.”  
KIPLING.

## CHAPTER II

### A LOVE LETTER

THE summer sun shone fully into the white-panelled breakfast-room at Belit Place. One of the three French windows stood open, the white curtains swaying in the gentle breeze.

Miss Julia Mortimer-Beltane sat at the head of the breakfast table, meditatively sipping her coffee, and crumbling a piece of toast to uneatable fragments.

Beside her plate lay an open letter—the closely-written sheets proclaiming its importance. Her thoughts were reminiscent and tinged with melancholy, reaching back twenty years—almost half her lifetime—to her happy girlhood in her beloved father's house.

*Schloss Kornenbourg.*

*To a dying man much is excused, a measure of truth permitted, concerning the past which else may go unspoken.*

*To you, my dear Julia, I come once more, but with a difference, and the shadow of death between us.*

*Death as a decisive factor in my life amuses me; I laugh at his pretensions with the knowledge that in squeezing me out, he leaves you dry! When I pass I take with me all you might have been—I take it from you, dear Julia—the richness, the fulness, the lusciousness of life, which, in my arms you would have learned to know, but which now passes for ever from you.*

*I die secure in the knowledge you can never forget me; I leave more than a sentimental memory; may*



*I hope for a haunting regret, unconfirmed, yet slowly timed to reveal itself. You will see it in my daughter—the one child Pauline bore me. There should have been others, but fate, or a superabundance of mistresses sapped the fountain-head of my paternity. Do I shock your prudishness, dear Julia, when I tell you I was not faithful to Pauline? You made me suffer the torments of the damned, and so I persuaded your charming sister to share them with me.*

*Pauline was proud; she knew that to me she was only your physical substitute, but she was not cold with your northern frigidity; in my arms she melted—crying out for my love, my tenderness, yet knowing those sentiments centred in you. Even in our worst moments she imposed silence on herself—would not confess she was but your shadowy substitute, her possession my hold on you. Yet, she knew. We are lonely devils in this world, my Julia.*

*Can the possession of the one woman companion a man through the wild wastes of the world? I ask—but I cannot answer. Your long tapering fingers held the secret in your narrow palms, and now I shall never know.*

*Do you know—have you ever known, you cold, proud woman, what Love is? What Love can be? I doubt it. I might have taught you.*

*You were at once my crucifixion and my fate. From your disdain came the distorting shaft of hunger which tore my soul—overshadowing my life. Lycanthia is the blossoming from that scorching pain. Sown in the soil I despised—carrying in her essence the ravenous hunger of my fruitless passion, never assuaged, always seeking—yet never coming to fulfilment. Such is she—so I send her to you. She will have no other shelter but her mother's sister, for I go into the Hades of lost souls. I laugh, and I wonder! What will you make of her? This, my daughter,*

*flesh of my flesh, bred from the wild imaginings of your nearness to me. You, who never lay in my arms, or sheltered your sweetness against my heart!*

*Lying awaiting death, I look back along the broad road of my life, and this one truth I know—"Vanity, vanity, all is vanity; dust and dross and the bitter aloes of fruitless ambition."*

As she sat, reviewing those distant years, she dubbed herself in her secret thoughts an "old maid." In 1870, unmarried women whose years numbered forty or more were so considered. She was not resentful of the disparaging description; self-possessed, her personal assurance carried her wheresoever she wished to go. Wealthy, handsome and capable, with numerous relations in prominent positions—diplomatic and political—her life was passed in surroundings congenial to her haughty spirit.

Considering the letter, she asked herself why she had not married. Suitors had presented themselves during her father's lifetime, and since his death, but none had pleased her sufficiently to induce her to change her status.

The one man whose insistence had disturbed her virginal calm in the days of her young womanhood was dead; his farewell contained in the letter lying on the table. Yet she had not loved him; no tender thoughts surrounded his memory; wherein lay his power to disturb her now? He stood out importantly in the background of her life—undesirably so. Refused by her, he had, a year

later, married her youngest sister, Pauline, and taken her away to his distant home in Poland.

She had not regretted her own part in their fiery love affair. His passion had affrighted her well-trained English reserve, untouched by the glamour of personal attraction. Yet, sitting in her sunlit

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breakfast-room, surrounded by refinements of a cultured taste, she instinctively knew that as she had chosen nearly twenty-three years ago, so had her future been determined. Unwedded she would go to her grave.

The curtains moved more rapidly as a stirring breeze blew in from the garden. She looked at them—then beyond—across the gravelled terrace, the wide stretch of carefully-tended lawn, to the pond, whereon her favourite Portuguese ducks were taking a morning bath.

Life suddenly changed its texture and its possibilities. It grew definitely emptier than it had been only twenty-four hours before.

She had passed romance by, scorning it for its undesired eroticism in her heedless youth when all the world seemed at her feet.

She shivered. What ailed her? Perhaps the heedless breeze from the walled-in garden stirring her muslin curtains.

For a moment her self-confidence was shaken; dimly rose the question—had she been wise to enfold herself in the mantle of self-sufficiency which asked of no man companionship or regard?

As she rose from the table, grasping in one shaking hand her voluminous correspondence, she stumbled — passing from the security of a settled assurance of her

own omnipotence to shape her life as she would— to the pitiful dread of life's full value missed.

Casimir Kritzulesco held her more securely in death than had been his power to do in life. From the grave he looked back—he beckoned and she moved to his behest. He had been so sure of his power to bend her to his ends through his daughter, in whose veins their mutual life streams flowed.

An emotion she could not analyse suffused her to the deadening of her usual calm. Crossing the breakfast-room to the door she trembled, her hand groped over

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the oak panels to find the handle; gone was her usual serenity.

In the Chinese morning-room she seated herself before the crimson and gold lacquered writing-table. Her brother-in-law's letter had shaken her, unexpected in its confirmation of her carefully glossed over suspicions of twenty years, which now spoke to her from the grave.

She spread the closely-written sheets of large-sized paper out on her desk, the coronet in the left-hand comer stood out boldly—almost shouted at her the heraldic insignia of his rank; she put her hand over it, the handwriting was not so significant of his identity. Count Sigismund Casimir Kritzulesco of Kornenbourg Schloss, the husband of her dead sister, Pauline.

Closing her eyes for a moment, a curious revulsion of emotion steadied her. She would not permit his written panegyrics to disturb her. She folded the scattered sheets and replaced them in the square envelope. Underneath lay another document—oblong, its stamps also Polish. Reluctantly she turned it over. What further unpleasantness could it contain? As she looked she

realized her brother-in-law's letter had shocked her; she hesitated to probe further into Polish news. Common sense recalled her to her inborn sense of duty—looming large in the routine of life she conscientiously followed.

The second letter conveyed everything the first had omitted to stress in its vague generalities. It came from Kritzulesco's man of business at Cracow, announcing the death of the Count and such terms of his will as affected Miss Mortimer-Beltane.

At his death without a male heir, his Polish estates passed to a nephew, a middle-aged man with a family, who desired to enter into possession of his heritage as quickly as possible.

By the Count's instructions his only child, a daughter,

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of seventeen years, and Miss Mortimer-Beltane's niece, was to be sent to her aunt's care in England. The letter apprising the lady of this arrangement was to be despatched by a special messenger to London, three days before the departure of the young lady.

As she read these lines, Miss Julia gasped; in three days this unknown and uninvited Polish niece would arrive.

Miss Julia read on:

*The Count regretted the provision he was able to make for his daughter was far below what was suitable for her rank. The sum of three hundred pounds a year would suffice for her personal needs, but doubtless her wealthy aunt would supply all deficiencies. The young lady was bringing with her her old nurse, the devoted woman who had fostered her from birth.*

Again Miss Julia paused, recollecting her sister's plaint to her father after the birth of the infant.

*The woman is to receive a wage of ten pounds a year and two complete sets of new clothes.*

This information Miss Julia also considered; the outlay was preposterous.

But all securities and monetary instructions were already deposited with Messrs. Coutts, the eminent London bankers and to them the Cracow lawyer referred his honoured Miss Mortimer-Beltane.

The arrangement, even premeditated, the forcing upon her privacy of this unknown niece by her dead sister's husband—the persistent lover of her youth—roused for a brief moment, the lady's indignation. Kritzulesco had ignored her privilege of considering the responsibility he was forcing upon her. His decision was to be accepted without the opportunity

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of refusal. Quickly her chagrin faded. For the sake of her dead sister she could not refuse the security her home would provide for the orphan girl, barely past childhood.

Then she acted quickly. Summoning her housekeeper, she gave instructions for preparing the rooms suitable for the expected guest and her maid, and an hour later, seated in her barouche, behind her favourite iron-grey horses, she was driven down to London to interview the manager at Messrs. Coutts' bank, an acquaintance of many years.

The genial manager proved helpful, his instructions from Cracow having reached him the preceding

afternoon. Beyond the natural disturbance her brother-in-law's abrupt announcement had caused, his arrangements were contrived to spare Miss Mortimer-Beltane all personal worry.

"The young lady is due to-morrow. My advice from Cracow warns me she and her attendant should reach Victoria Station about three o'clock in the afternoon. I am sending my secretary to meet the continental train and convey Miss Kritzulesco to Belit Place: two conveyances have been ordered for the purpose."

"Should I arrange to meet her?" Miss Mortimer-Beltane's voice sounded dubious.

"Quite unnecessary. The drive to Hampstead is long; the young lady may be slightly nervous, also fatigued. Driving alone with her attendant will be better for her and certainly less awkward for you." This arrangement Miss Mortimer-Beltane approved.

To receive this unknown girl in the privacy of her own house rather than on the public platform of a railway station, appealed to her carefully-tutored emotions at seeing for the first time her dead sister's daughter.

The young lady disposed of all fanciful sentiments directly she entered the outer hall of Belit Place.

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Tall, composed, with the assurance of a woman of thirty, she greeted her aunt, speaking English as perfectly as Miss Julia.

"I am Lycanthia Kritzulesco," she said, advancing quickly with a springing, noiseless step, unusual in so tall a girl.

Miss Julia perceived grace—a pale, long face, light hair and piercingly observant eyes before her in the

shaded light; her first impression was not unfavourable, but this unknown niece was no helpless maiden of seventeen. So much she realized; then recollections of her girlhood, shared with Lycanthia's mother, brought to her eyes the unaccustomed tears.

"You are very welcome, my niece," she said, holding out both hands.

Lycanthia took one in her firm grasp, then turning round to a woman immediately behind, interrupted:

"Auntie, this is Maga, my foster-mother, who took me into her care when I was twelve hours old."

A woman of short stature, garmented in a dress of black, a cloak lined with deep blue depending from her narrow shoulders, made a respectful curtsy, dropping her eyes humbly before the lady of the house.

"She has no conversational English," Lycanthia went on, "only nouns and a few adjectives, but she understands more than you would suppose."

Again the woman curtsied. Miss Julia looked attentively at the pale, pinched face and faded brown hair showing on either side of a tightly-coifed headdress of black silk. Instinctively she disliked the silent demureness of her niece's attendant.

"Mrs. Scott will look after her—will take her to the rooms prepared." She signalled to her housekeeper waiting in the background.

"But there is one more introduction," cried Lycanthia.

From behind the waiting woman slowly paced into view a big-boned, brown-coated dog, a collar of iron with spikes set at intervals in the band round his powerful neck, and a steel chain budded on to the collar held by the maid.



“Is he savage?” was Miss Julia’s question, doubtfully surveying the group before her.

Lycanthia laughed.

“Not with me—nor with you when he knows you. See here, Dlugoss,” addressing the hound, “this is a friend.” Then changing from English, she spoke rapidly in Polish; the dog drew nearer, watching Miss Julia with a furtive consideration she found embarrassing. He raised a gigantic paw, holding it out. “He would shake your hand, auntie. Be not afraid, once he accepts you as a friend, he will guard you as he does me.”

Miss Julia was not sure she desired the attentions of the formidable animal facing her, but again, twice in forty-eight hours, personal choice was denied her. Hesitatingly she accepted the proffered allegiance. She took the dog’s paw, gravely shaking it; he submitted, his head turned aside as though unwilling to meet her eyes. His mistress expressed her satisfaction at a pact she obviously thought desirable, then dismissing her attendant and dog to the care of Mrs. Scott, ushered her aunt into that lady’s own drawing-room.

“How different I find everything here,” she observed brightly, “this room of yours sings with the sunshine. What have you on the walls?” Quickly she stepped to the side of the room, tapping her fingers on the beautiful Chinese paper. “Why, auntie, is it just paper?”

Before Miss Julia could reply, she passed on to other inquiries; the meaning of the scarlet and gold Chinese

furniture—why her aunt lived so far out of London—if she had good riding horses—what hunts she could join.

“If you will give me time to answer your questions, your curiosity shall be satisfied.”

Miss Julia spoke stiffly. Suddenly the girl's mood changed; a sombre curtain fell across her features.

"Sit down, Lycanthia, some tea will be brought before you go to your room. You must be fatigued after your long journey."

"No—and yes. Please do not give me tea; I do not like it. But, yes, I am a little tired because I have seen so much newness."

"You speak good English."

"Why, yes. Miss Lynne always talked English and sometimes my father, when he did not wish the servants to understand."

Miss Julia hesitated.

"There is so much I wish to ask you—to get to understand you; we are such strangers to each other."

"To you I may be, but about you I know much." Again her voice changed, her pale brown eyes, rimmed in red round the pupils, flickered. "You are the only woman my father loved, so when he died he arranged for me to come to you."

"My dear child," cried Miss Julia, "what are you saying?"

"The truth. My mother knew it. Miss Lynne knew it, but she forbade me to talk of it. Maga knows it, and, oh! she was curious to see you."

"You distress me greatly." Miss Julia's voice trembled, "you forget your mother was my sister."

"No, I do not, but I am not shocked. She knew my father married her because you would not have him." She turned a keenly observant look at Miss Julia's disconcerted face. "I wonder if I should have been different if you had been my mother?"

The question was enigmatic—more so than either speaker or hearer realized.

“Do not dwell on such improbable suppositions.” Miss Julia’s self-possession was shaken; she felt unable to deal with the unusual situation so divested of her social conventions. “In England, dear Lycanthia, it is not *comme il faut* to discuss, so freely, the private affairs of your elders.”

Lycanthia turned a keenly scrutinizing look on her aunt.

“But why not? I seem to belong to the private affairs of three ‘elders,’ my mother, my father, and you. You are the last. Between you three, or what you did or did not, I am. Naturally you three concern me. I try to explain myself by explaining you.”

“There is nothing to explain.” Miss Julia was suddenly conscious of her inability to ‘manage’ this seventeen-year-old niece. “We were three ordinary persons and I, the last, am a simple English gentlewoman—at least, I hope so.”

“I have still to ‘learn’ you, auntie. My mother died so long ago I was too young to understand her; I remember only her tears and her regrets. You seem, in some way, like her, but I think you do not cry easily.”

Miss Julia started.

“I should hope not.”

“Perhaps because you did not know how devastating it is to love a man who loves your sister.”

Miss Julia frowned; this extraordinary conversation could not be permitted to continue.

“Lycanthia, I must beg of you to cease these reflections on your father. They are undutiful, they — they offend good taste.” She paused.

Lycanthia laughed.

“My father was an interesting man.” She looked through the open windows to the garden beyond. “Do you always live in a house on the ground?”

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“Where else could a house be than on the ground? There must be foundations.”

“Ah, yes, that is so. But my home is on a mountainside, bare rock round it, a narrow road winding through the forest from the village on the plain below, the windows small and barred, the floors of stone with fur rugs. There we do not hang silk by the windows, nor put paper on the walls.”

“But surely not all your life has been spent at Kornenbourg; you have seen other towns than Cracow. Your father has relations in Vienna; have you never visited them?”

Lycanthia shook her head.

“No. My father never returned to society after he left diplomacy. He told me so. He said you closed that life. You were part of the great events, and when you rejected him he changed it all.”

Miss Julia rose from her high-backed chair.

“I forbid you to join my name with your father’s. It is unfair to me. I never encouraged him in his suit to me.” Agitation choked her voice.

Lycanthia interrupted mercilessly:

“I know—he said he could not blame you or reproach you if he could things would have been easier; he might even have forced you to the only reparation you could make”—thoughtfully she considered—“ then Pauline would not have come into it, and I should be your child.”

Miss Julia's composure forsook her. With as great a measure of dignity as she could impose on herself, she walked to the door, opened it, passed through, and closed it behind her.

Lycanthia watched her curiously. A multitude of disconnected ideas, impressions, conjectures evolved in her quick Slavonic brain. Would an understanding friendship be possible with this strange new relation—

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so unlike her Polish relations—yet in some way akin to dear Miss Lynne?

Drawing from a deep pocket, concealed in a fold of her coarse, grey linen gown, a polished silver case, she took out a small cigar and, lighting it, settled herself luxuriously in one of the two easy chairs and began to smoke.

Her large hands with long, pointed nails, deeply stained with brown at the finger-tips, handled the cigar impatiently. She watched the spirals of smoke curling up against a yellow and black lacquered cabinet beside her chair. What was she going to get out of all this? Such over-filled rooms, so many chairs and useless *bijouterie*, bewitching without pleasing. Disgustedly she pulled off her travelling hat, a turban-shaped straw with herons' feathers arranged as an aigrette, and threw it on the Persian rug beneath her feet.

The door opened to admit the butler and two footmen carrying in the afternoon tea accessories.

Lycanthia addressed the startled man from the smoke screen swirling around her.

"I am thirsty, bring me some white wine."

Well-bred young ladies did not smoke in the social world Jason, the butler, worked in. But he was not

narrow-minded, only domestically prejudiced; he had expected eccentricity from a young lady born and reared in Poland, but nothing so dumbfounding as cigar-smoking coupled with a request for white wine. Young gentlemen home from Eton or Harrow had provided problems in the carrying out of his duties to all parties concerned. He temporized.

“Have you any particular choice, miss?” he asked.

“Any light French wines?” Lycanthia was feeling her way. “Or a cognac.”

Jason felt here indeed was the occasion for seeking guidance from the higher powers. He quitted the morning-room in search of Miss Mortimer-Beltane.

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Miss Julia, victim to an unaccustomed, but acute nervous headache, was in her bedroom, endeavouring with a scant measure of success to regain her usual tranquillity. She listened to her maid’s inquiry.

“Tell Jason to offer the young lady Chablis; she may be accustomed to wine in the afternoon; Polish ladies have other habits—foreign to us.”

She felt the inadequacy of her excuses, but family pride must be preserved. She braced herself anew to face the situation staging itself in her morning-room.

Lycanthia welcomed her aunt’s return with a favourable comment as to the quality of the wine she was sampling. Omitting to notice the peculiarity of her niece’s choice of an afternoon beverage, Miss Julia poured out the tea.

“Will you have a cake or a scone?” was her hospitable query.

“I am not hungry, besides a good cigar and excellent wine are spoiled by confectionery.”

“Do you generally smoke cigars?” The question flew to her lips almost against her intention, for Miss Julia detested tobacco in any form.

“No—mostly cigarettes: I prefer to roll them myself, but I finished mine coming in the train from Dover.”

Miss Julia ventured to assert herself.

“In future, Lycanthia, I would prefer you to confine smoking to your own room, or the library.”

“Do you not smoke then?” Her aunt’s decided negative impressed Lycanthia; she looked observantly at her. “Now I remember, my father told me English ladies never smoke. How strange. What a great pleasure you miss. In Poland all women smoke—and drink, too. Our peasants make their own whisky.”

“There must be a regrettable amount of insobriety in the villages.”

Lycanthia shrugged her shoulders.

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“What would you? Besides, a night’s sleep puts them right.” She smiled, a slow expansion of her features.” Why, auntie, I have gone to bed in my clothes after one of our festas.”

“But not intoxicated?” Miss Julia’s horror was too real for concealment.

“I expect you would term my sleepy condition so. But where is the harm? My father many times made bets among his friends to see who got under the table first! I even betted myself, watching the party from the little gallery above the fire-place. We Poles like good fellowship, and how can there be sport unless the heart is gay?”

Miss Julia did not know what reply could be suitable to such a statement.

“Perhaps you would like to see your bedroom. Come, let us go up.”

Lycanthia’s opinion was not delayed. Comprehensively she surveyed the commodious apartment apportioned to her.

“My bedroom at home would go four times into this; I shall be lost in its vastness!” she exclaimed.

The sound of her voice brought the woman, Maga, from the adjoining bedroom; she greeted her mistress in her native tongue. After a few sentences, unintelligible to Miss Julia, she returned to the inner room, closing the door.

“If the idea was not incredible, I could imagine that woman was a relation; there certainly is a likeness between you.”

“How clever of you to notice it so rapidly,” Lycanthia’s praise sounded genuine, “for you are right. Maga is my blood-aunt.”

“Your what?”

“My aunt by breeding, though not with the sanction of the Church.”

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Miss Julia covered her mouth with her hand to stifle an exclamation of horror.

“She is my grandfather’s last occasion—at least, so far as we know. Her mother was a forester’s daughter, a real witch, auntie, and she forced my grandfather to show he was still a man. He was seventy years then, and when Maga was born she was the toast of the village.”

Miss Julia’s fortitude failed her. Bewildered, even nauseated, she looked at her strange niece. What would Pauline have done with such a daughter? She turned from the contemplation of so much indelicate



knowledge; such an acquaintance with the side of life, she, Miss Mortimer-Beltane, had been trained to regard as evil.

Politely Lycanthia closed the door behind the unceremonious exit of her English aunt. The chaotic state of that aunt's emotions, as excited by her frank expositions of natural facts, was concealed from her. She had no perception of the impression she created on a lady, who by her tally of the years should have been her elder, yet who, indefinably, revealed herself as her junior.

She did not pursue this unimportant line of thought. To-day had to be gone through. She must discover her new orientation, then to-morrow and an endless stream of to-morrows must take care of themselves.

Clapping her hands, a signal used from her nursery days to summon her faithful Maga, she actively surveyed the furnishings of her bedroom, touching the curtains—the bed-hangings—the toilet-table discreetly draped in rose chintz.

Approval was not the expression of her strong-featured face: it denoted a dubious acceptance of the unaccountable.

The stranger within my gates.  
He may be evil or good.  
But I cannot tell what powers control—  
What reasons sway his mood;  
Nor when the gods of his far-off land  
May re-possess his blood.”

KIPLING.

## CHAPTER III

### LYCANTHIA

**L**YCANTHIA continued her perambulating of the bedroom; its roomy dimensions its only recommendation. Pausing by the door she called:

“Maga!”

The door opened, the maid obeying the awaited summons, head bent as it had been pressed against the key-hole.

“Maga,” said her mistress imperiously, “what do you make of it all?”

The maid mumbled a reply.

“Speak up, stupid head! You can say what you think—no one understands Polish.”

“It is not a place favourable to us.”

“Why not?”

Maga waved her arm above her head.

“We stifle here! Their foolishness—we sleep like geese in plucked feathers! To-night I sleep on the floor.”

“That will arrange itself in good time; my aunt has no knowledge of our life in Poland.”

“Do we stay here?”

“For the present, yes. What else can I do?”

“Better to marry Adam Lubomviski there back in Cracow in your own land, among your own people,” the woman urged passionately.

Lycanthia laughed.

“He is too holy; his love too reforming. Never could I fit into his mould.”

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“Far easier than here. We speak a different language—we think different thoughts; here is no happiness, no rest for you.”

“I was born restless.”

“He said because of his soul’s hunger for the English woman, the sister of your mother.”

“The lady downstairs. My aunt who received us when we came.”

“I hate her.” The woman’s vehemence was scathing.

“Do not be so sure. He and you are kin, you may become her slave as he was.”

“Never! Rather would I tear out my eyes than regard her with love.”

Further conversation was interrupted by the shaggy hound coming into the bedroom. He went up to his mistress, rubbing his head against her arm.

The maid pointed to him.

“And what do we do about him?”

“He stays. Why not? The English love dogs.”

“But he cannot for ever remain in these two rooms. Will she permit him free range of this house?”

“I will inquire. He sleeps with me, as always. There is a garden and free country beyond—miles of it, but we must give ourselves time.”

At Belit Place dinner was served at seven o’clock. Never had Miss Julia entered her dining-room with such trepidation as on this evening. What further aberrations of social conduct would her niece disclose?

Nothing unusual happened; Lycanthia was silent, exhibiting a moodiness which, as her acquaintance with her niece widened, Miss Julia came to recognize as part of her nervous temperament.

In the drawing-room, over coffee, a liqueur brandy, and a succession of cigarettes, Lycanthia emerged from her abstraction.

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“Auntie,” she began,” about our beds; those you have given us are beautiful, of course, but I cannot sleep in mine.”

Surprised at the announcement, Miss Julia asked:

“Why?”

“At home we have bedsteads of wood, then a big, thick mattress of leather, stuffed with the feathers of geese and chopped straw, our leather pillows the same. I have two sheets, and in winter a big linen sack, filled with down as a cover. But Maga has her leather bed and pillow, and either a wolf pelt or a bear’s pelt to cover her.”

Miss Julia was formality personified as she responded:

“We have no such bed-furnishings here. We are English and your Polish maid must fit into English ways.”

“Surely there are shops where such articles may be purchased.”

“Undoubtedly—if ordered. We English are the first manufacturers in the world.”

“That is fortunate—even if no one has yet seen our simple beds, much less costly than yours.”

“I would prefer less freedom in the expression of your opinions.” Miss Julia neither understood nor appreciated the casual personal equality tone of her niece’s remarks.

“How else can I let you know what I think?”

Miss Julia was tempted to retort she was not unduly interested in Lycanthia’s opinions. To overcome the temptation, she said:

“About that dog you brought with you. We have no hounds here now, only a couple of bull-terriers my coachman keeps in the stables, but there is a disused kennel in the front garden and a little lime-wash would make it habitable.”

“Dlugoss sleeps with me, auntie, and he is accustomed to roam about as he likes.”

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“My dear Lycanthia! That big dog to sleep with you!”

Miss Julia’s voice was decided. “I cannot consent to his roaming about the house, the servants would be terrified. You do not realize what a formidable-looking beast he is.”

“His granddam’s sire was a wolf, but he is very human, auntie. If I introduce him to each of your servants, he will understand they are to be guarded.”

“No animal with a wolfish ancestry can resemble a human being.”

“Ah, we know differently in Poland. In every village there is a werwolf. Maga’s mother was a witch, one of the handsomest women in our district; and where a witch is, a werwolf makes a home.”

“Of course,” observed Miss Julia frigidly, “my general education included certain information concerning superstitions, not only in my own country but in others. Those mid-European tales of vampires and werwolves never impressed me; they are too obviously fantastic to be true.”

“You English are narrowly matter-of-fact. What you have not seen, you do not believe.”

“Rubbish!” ejaculated Miss Julia angrily.

“I am of the Roman Catholic religion, but I do know something of what is believed by Protestants. If, auntie, you will not believe in witches and werwolves because you have never seen them, can you believe in God? Him you have never seen.” Lycanthia’s voice, always husky, was impersonally steady.

Miss Julia’s usually impassive face coloured.

“You touch on matters in a manner dangerously near to blasphemy,” was her only retort.

“By no means. God is God. So our Churches teach. But are priests always truthful? You do not know, so how can you argue? In Poland we do know

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there are vampires and witches and werwolves”—she gave a throaty laugh—“even you might see one some day, if you come to Poland.”

“My curiosity will never tempt me to delve into satanic mysteries,” retorted the now indignant lady. “Thank God, I am a narrow, ‘matter-of-fact Englishwoman,’ not prone to believe in foolish old wives’ tales.”

“Neither English birth nor education will change facts.” Lycanthia spoke thoughtfully, her strongly marked face losing its youthful contours as she pondered. Her attitude imposed its force upon her aunt.

“You do not speak like a girl of seventeen.” Regret tinged her voice.

“My life has been passed with mature persons. I have no friends—certainly I never wished for any.”

“How did you spend your days?” Miss Julia did not intend to exhibit curiosity, but if she was to understand this unusual girl, some details of her life—her occupations—were essential.

Lycanthia threw back her head, blowing wisps of cigarette smoke into the still air; its vapour concealed her face.

“When my father was away, Miss Lynne and I had breakfast at seven in the summer—or earlier; and in winter about eight. When I could not escape—that was when Father Politus was in the chapel—I made my prayers.”

“Who is Father Politus?”

“Our family priest. He taught me French and some Latin; he is French, but he loved my father’s wines and whisky too much. We make our own on our home farm. All our peasants make theirs—my father permitted it.”

Miss Julia sighed.

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“After your morning prayers, what then?”

“Reading English with Miss Lynne two mornings; and learning Polish and our history and literature from



a lady teacher from Cracow. She came on Mondays and stayed until Thursday mornings.”

“I rejoice to hear your father attended to your education.”

“That was Miss Lynne. She said she could not teach anything but English. She wished to leave—to go back to her own home as her mother needed her. Father persuaded her to ask her mother to come to Poland—so she came.”

“What a journey for an elderly person.”

“She made nothing of it. Her father had been a sea-captain and her husband a sea-captain, and she lived at Newcastle. So one summer she came by boat to Danzig and our lawyer sent his son to meet her and bring her to Cracow.”

“What happened to her when Miss Lynne died?”

“She died first, about six months before Linnie, and father said, ‘Bury her in the family vault; it’s big enough.’ So we did, and when Linnie died we put her beside her mother. When I saw father later, he laughed about it; he knew then he had not much chance of recovering from the goring he had from the wild boar.

“‘Lycanthia,’ he said, ‘keep your own counsel about those strangers lying among our dead when your cousin comes to Kornenbourg, or he may cast them out.’”

“Your father knew the seriousness of his condition?” Miss Julia’s inquiring voice was low.

“He knew. My father was no coward.” She looked quickly at her aunt. “I wonder you never fell in love with him. He had plenty of lady friends—before

mother died, and after. Very handsome and amusing they were.”

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“But were you permitted to meet such persons?”

“Father was amused to show me to his friends. Maga taught me our village dances and I often danced on the long table in the hall, among the dishes and the glasses. If I danced without breaking any, they gave me presents, and when I was thirsty they toasted me.” She ceased, watching her aunt furtively, omitting the finishing details of these carousals, of sips from every glass until the potent spirit sent her staggering into arms waiting to catch her and carry her to her bedchamber. But Miss Julia’s imagination supplied the probable endings to these scenes.

“Were you permitted to display yourself thus, during your mother’s lifetime?”

“I danced on my fifth birthday for the first time. My mother was ill then, the beginning of her sickness, and Maga told me to keep silence to her. But my father told her. He said it was well to keep my restlessness to my feet.” She laughed. “Of course I have no memory of his words. Maga told me later.”

“Surely your mother grieved?”

Lycanthia smiled—a crooked smirk which raised her upper lip.

“Maybe, I do not know. My father was an interesting man; life with him could not be dull.”

“So it seems from what you tell me.”

“He was much away, but when he was at home I went with him over our estates and to our farms.”

“I have always understood Polish ladies ride: I must get you a horse. I ride when the weather permits, so we can go out together.”

“The roads around Cracow were mostly wooden roads, my father said like those around Moscow, built by order of Peter the Great, so we drove if we were spending a night away. You would not like our roads, auntie, they are not smooth like yours; our carriages

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jolt and jump; my father always took our leather pillows to ease our bones.”

“Then when did you ride?”

“When we could be back by nightfall, or when we went to the hunt. There is much hunting round Kornenbourg, wolves and bears. Oh!” ecstatically throwing back her head, “the glorious freedom of those hunts!”

Miss Julia forced herself to an amazed silence, a qualm of horrified emotion shook her as an extraordinary contortion twisted Lycanthia’s face. Her features forced themselves into a narrow, pointed mask, the ends of her large mouth curving upwards towards her ears; the retreating upper lip showing her pointed teeth, stained by the too constant absorption of nicotine. She bent forward, her long, masculine hands touching the carpet; abruptly she straightened herself—then laughed.

“Your green carpet recalled the grassy rides in the forest,” she said, “for a moment I smelt the peat from the broken earth.”

Training in self-control stood Miss Julia well at this difficult moment. An unaccustomed sensation akin to horror crept over her body. She trembled.

“Cold, auntie?” asked Lycanthia, whose close observation of her aunt was not noticed by the lady.

“I do not know.” Miss Julia’s voice was stiffened by a pride which disdained to exhibit fear. Yet “fear” was uppermost at the moment. This strange girl was more than “unusual.” Her English strain of blood undoubtedly submerged by the wild Polish ancestry thrusting its ugliness forcibly into prominence. Yet Miss Julia could not recall the same “strangeness” in Lycanthia’s father. Un-English he had been, but not—here her mental soliloquy paused—how could she describe—even to herself—the creeping horror of her

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niece’s stooping attitude of a moment before? She could not. Ignorance baffled her penetration. Suddenly she realized the moral—or was it an unmoral?—ascendancy exercised by Lycanthia’s youth over her maturity. The seventeen years of her half-alien relation had acquired a depth of knowledge unplumbed by her. What was it? She raised her eyes to find Lycanthia watching her with a cynical understanding exceedingly disconcerting.

Then Lycanthia spoke.

“We may provide ourselves with suitable beds, may we not? And to-morrow you permit my Dlugoss to be introduced to your servants? It will be safer so, he is so understanding.”

Miss Julia made a forlorn attempt to retain the mastery of her household.

“But about visitors? I may have callers.”

“I will warn him.”

“Warn him?” Miss Julia’s voice was shrill with dismay. “What intelligent person would expect a half wolfhound to respect warning?”

“You shall see. But to ease your mind, auntie, give me a comer in your spacious garden which can be enclosed, and there he can stay during visitors’ calling hours.”

“That can be arranged, but, Lycanthia, I beg of you not to permit that huge creature to sleep in your bedroom. It is not healthy.”

“Ah! have no fear; I am used to dogs. Dlugoss has been with me all his life. He is now five years old. Maga’s cousin—our chief forester—bred him. In Poland it is wise to have our dogs as guards.”

Miss Julia capitulated. Opposition to the hard determination of her niece’s seventeen years was beyond her physical strength. She rose to her feet.

“I am unusually fatigued,” she said. “I am going

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to bed.” She made no attempt to exercise the prerogative of her age or relationship by suggesting Lycanthia should do the same.

“I go also to bed. When I know this district, Dlugoss, Maga and I will take walks before going to bed.”

Miss Julia paused.

“It is not considered conventional for young ladies to wander unescorted over our heath.”

“But I shall not be alone. What safer escort can I have than Dlugoss? And Maga is a Pole—not easily abashed by strangers.”

Miss Julia turned away, gathering her handkerchief and amethyst-topped scent-bottle in a hand not as steady as its wont. Angrily she clenched it over the lace-edged square of cambric; such an uncontrolled measure of trepidation was hurtful to a vanity unused to opposition and defeat by seventeen years of supposedly unfledged schoolgirl immaturity.

“It is because man is half angel, half brute, that his inner life witnesses such bitter war between such unlike natures. The brute in him clamours for sensual joy and things in which there is only vanity.”

MOSES OF COUCY.

## CHAPTER IV

### CASTLE KORNENBOURG

THE note dispatched by Miss Julia to Berkeley Square the following morning was, had she realized it, an appeal for help, for advice, but especially for moral support, from her cousin, Lord Westhaughton.

She wrote in her fine, spidery script:

*Dear Edward,*

*Can you come and see me—or may I come and see you? I am in a difficulty. My niece, Lycanthia Kritzulesco—poor Pauline's daughter—has arrived, accompanied by an enormous dog who sleeps in her bedroom, a ferocious-looking animal; and her nurse Maga.*

*Dear Lycanthia is unlike any of our English relations; such freedom, such disregard for our social conventions makes me a little afraid.*

*She speaks English as fluently as I do. She smokes and drinks wine and spirits in the afternoon, and wishes to have a leather mattress to sleep on.*

*It is all rather confusing, but I trust will arrange itself better than I now expect. She is a Roman Catholic. Her father maintained a resident priest—a Frenchman who, I fear, from dear Lycanthia's description, did not exercise a real moral influence over his surroundings. A fondness for wine and alcohol and disregard for personal cleanliness are her recollections of him, but he taught her the French language despite his clerical shortcomings.*



Lord Westhaughton's perusal of the letter roused amusing memories.

Two years after his cousin Pauline's marriage to Count Kritzulesco, he had accepted a shooting invitation to Cracow from him. Westhaughton was then at Vienna, a young secretary at the English Embassy. He had enjoyed the visit. The sport was excellent, albeit not easily secured. The romantic outlines of his cousin's Polish home was its outstanding merit, for within the grey stone walls, centuries-old dirt darkening their barrenness, all comfort was banished; its inmates plunged three centuries back in time. The stone-flagged rooms and passages, covered sparsely by the tanned skins of bears and wolves, struck chillingly through his elegant English footwear. Clumsily-worked tapestry hangings, stained by damp and faded by dust, hung before the small paned windows, or cupboard-sized doors, without providing warmth or suggesting comfort. Pewter basins and water-cans; home-made candles stuck on pointed iron candle-spikes; a few huge logs thrown across iron firebars on the wide hearth were the only provision for civilized amenities in the sleeping cell allotted to him. After a hard day's sport the solid consistency of his leather mattress and stumpy pillows were minor discomforts, for a healthy fatigue plunged him into dreamless sleep which obliterated his unusual surroundings.

The roomy apartment on the first floor used by his cousin as her sitting-room was fitted up with a certain regard for her comfort. A heavy drugget covered the stone-flagged floor, and over that a flamboyant French Empire carpet gave colour and suggested warmth. The tapestry on the walls was Gobelins, in greens and blues,

and crimson velvet curtains before the windows concealed the rough, dark oaken shutters demanded by the frigid, long winters and cold springs of the mid-European country.

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At the time of his visit, youth and the excellent sporting possibilities of the castle and estate blinded him to the true position of Pauline in her husband's household. She lived much alone, taking her meals in a small room opening out of her sitting-room, companioned by the French priest. Her choice had not surprised him. The meal in the great hall, hastily partaken of by the huntsmen before leaving in the early morning, was a hurried affair, by the generously-spread buffet, with scant regard to niceties of table manners. Certainly in that rough crowd Pauline had been out of place. Possibly she knew it; the priest also.

The evening meal was no less an orgy, made the more uproarious by the unstinted flow of wines and spirits whose quality was Kritzulesco's personal selection. Bawdy songs, loosened garments, wine-stained cloths, disordered, coarse talk, foul jests, and a general casting-off of civilized restraints had repelled Westhaughton almost as much as the senseless swilling of flagons of drink—with results disgusting to the clean-living Englishman, who could not forget his ostensible hostess was his own cousin.

He wondered then what Pauline thought of it all—the swinish behaviour of her husband's fellow-roisterers, but she had given him no opportunity of asking. Cold pride fenced her off from his curiosity. Yet she did not look unhappy. Her burning eyes pierced through his English

stolidness as though challenging him to question her satisfaction with her life—and its social implications.

But he accepted no more invitations to Kornenbourg. By temperament and choice a temperate man, he found neither amusement nor pleasure in the drunken orgies in Kritzulesco's cheerless home. Rather was he disgusted. Pauline, by her speechless rejection of his puzzled probings into her private thoughts,

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closed the door on cousinly commiserations. He felt she did not want them. Being a cautious young man he said nothing derogatory of his Polish connections when he returned to England. Of what use to voice his misgivings? Pauline had chosen her own life. To know how sordid one side of it was could only pain her father and sister, nor could they venture to intrude into the secret fastnesses of her home despite its grim realities.

For years he carried in his memory the scene staged the last night of his visit. Long after the greasy platters and dishes had been removed and most men had drunk their fill, some sleepy—some garrulous—some confiding, but all at the mercy of befuddled wits, a number of women trooped into the hall. Not all were young, but most were merry and well used to their pastime of making love to drunken men. As he slipped through the door to the staircase, his host seized a slight, fair-haired wench and put her on the trestle dining-table.

“Strip and dance, Maga,” he shouted. “Dance like hell; we are young once and never again. But dance, girl, dance.”

Westhaughton returned to Vienna the next morning, and a year later was moved to Paris. Two years after he

married and other duties and ambitions blotted out the memory of his cousin Pauline and her Polish husband.

He reread the letter; certainly verbosity was not an attribute of decorous Julia's correspondence. The newly-arrived cousin provoked curiosity, not only on account of her unconventional habits, but from her personal origin; the child of his dead cousin, Pauline, and the rejected suitor of the living cousin, Julia. The latter a lady nurtured in Victorian religious and social principles, rigid in her application of them, even to her own discomfort. He pondered the position. Certainly it presented difficulties but they were not his personal concern. Thrust upon Miss Julia, the young

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lady's nearest relation, by a man akin only by marriage, yet determined to claim that frail link with the fatality of the gambler, she was enmeshed in his determination.

For the sake of her dead sister she must accept the responsibility of that sister's daughter, orphaned by an accident and temperamentally unfit to fare forth alone upon the tricky way of life.

He refolded the letter, thrusting it into his letter-case. He was a short, fair man, wearing his hair parted down the middle of his long head; a drooping moustache above a pointed beard, giving an air of severity to an otherwise benign countenance, contradicted by two shrewd, blue eyes.

Business on an important committee at the House of Lords prevented his going out to Belit Place to see Miss Julia, but being a trustee under her father's will, his cousinly advice was always at her disposal, although her claims on his time were few. She was a capable woman, gifted with common sense, and she managed the daily

affairs of her strictly regulated life with dignity and efficiency.

Again he smiled. Fate, indeed, was playing her a malicious trick by thrusting into her conventuality this most bewildering half-English niece. How would the situation adjust itself? Its success depended probably more upon Lycanthia than on her aunt. Miss Julia's natural kindness was of the expanding order—moreover, she was not a selfish woman. Devoted attendance upon her exigent father had blunted the angles of her young womanhood. Friends from childhood, Miss Julia and Westhaughton had never essayed the tender dalliance of sentimental adolescence. He had matured late, and she, over shadowed by her widowed father's need for female companionship, had never flowered into regions wherein a mate is sought.

This paternal possession was one, possibly the

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deciding reason, why Kritzulesco had failed to rouse response to his passion. Her sex instincts were stunted from the day of her mother's death. Her cousin, from the masculine conception of his world, understood the meaning of his cousin's unmarried estate. When his own affairs had no immediate claim upon his attentions, he spared her the unrecognized sentiment of pity. At such moments she experienced a mutual sense of sympathy, fleeting, yet comforting without suspecting its source.

"Poor devil!"—he apostrophized her ignorance—"an unmarried virgin of chaste life is a pitiful waste in the economies of the race. She deserves something better than the slow decay of growing old in undeveloped womanhood."

Eligible men were, by his contrivance, introduced to her, but none succeeded in breaking through the reserve of years.

Unconsciously she measured all advances by the fiery standards of Kritzulesco; measured by his insistence, all lesser men left her sensibilities cold. There had been moments when Westhaughton's musings came dangerously near to suspecting this—but as Kritzulesco was Pauline's husband, he rejected the reflection as ill-timed.

The coming of Kritzulesco's daughter must prove disturbing, recalling those long past days of Miss Julia's brilliant youth.

"Well, we are all getting older," he told himself ruefully. "Julia is not the only one with a lengthening toll of years. It all happened twenty years ago Egad! why must we look back? Is the ancient milestone so much more romantic than the new? From now on Julia definitely passes into the sere and yellow leafage of a chaperon's metier."

So considering, he wrote his answer.

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*Dear Julia,*

*Drive down to see me at six this evening. I am engaged until then at the House, but will come back to Berkeley Square to meet you.*

*Ever yours,*

*Westhaughton.*

Through the dusty, wind-swept streets Miss Julia drove that gusty July afternoon from the cool heights of

Hampstead past Lord's Cricket Ground, down the Edgware Road and Park Lane, to the shadowed greenery of Berkeley Square.

Westhaughton met her in the hall, his quizzical smile restoring her equanimity.

"Well, Julia, so circumstances are forcing you back into the frivolities of London? I trust the young lady, consigned to your care, will not be too exigent in her demands for balls and parties next season."

"I am not looking so far into the future as next year. It is the present which disturbs me."

"I read your letter—nothing unusual in a young lady of Polish ancestry."

"But surely her English mother counts for some influence?"

"A daughter generally inherits most from her father; even from her paternal grandmother."

"In her case her grandmother was a Pole, the Princess Marie Jablonowski. When Pauline married, my father made several inquiries about Casimir's relations and I do remember the Ambassador particularly mentioned his mother."

"Anything detrimental to the lady?" His tone was jocular; his cousin's disturbed manner prompting him to make light of her perplexities.

"It is all so long ago: I scarce recall the details."

"Are they necessary? The Princess joined the majority twenty years ago; why trouble about her?"

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"What I am trying to do, is to understand Lycanthia."

"An extraordinary name—yet attractive."

"You are not very helpful." Miss Julia was groping—not definitely—but anxiously—to share her perplexities.

“She is my niece, but your cousin.”

“First cousin once removed,” he corrected absentmindedly, grasping the pith of the situation without enthusiasm.

“One or two removes is of small consequence! There she is and I do not know what to do with her.”

“Kritzulesco has certainly avenged your personal disinclinations. He was devilish fond of you, Julia. Not many would have stood up against his fervent devotion. To be candid, I pitied the fellow”—he paused, looking straightly at her then asked: “Have you never regretted refusing him?”

Miss Julia’s fine eyes flashed.

“You forget, Westhaughton, you are speaking of my dead sister’s husband.”

He corrected her firmly.

“No, I am not! I speak of the man who was your suitor before becoming Pauline’s husband. Delicacy over the matter is unnecessary. Pauline was an afterthought, and none of us knew that more clearly than she did.”

“I repeat, you are not proving helpful.”

“How can I on the spur of the moment? Seems to my benighted intelligence a young lady of seventeen is more a charge for the ladies of the family than for the men. We should come into the picture later. Is she good-looking?”

Miss Julia looked troubled.

“I really cannot decide. She is unusual. Very self-assured; attractive in a strange kind of way. She seems full of life—powerful life; when she comes near me I feel she is strong—vital—pressing against

my weakness. Yet, you know, Edward, I am not a weak woman.”



“Glad you have forgiven me sufficiently to remember my name,” he commented dryly, “but I can assure you, Julia, I never regarded you as ‘weak.’”

“Yet with Lycanthia I feel at a disadvantage—as though I was being played with.”

“Nonsense! You are prejudiced against this daughter of Kritzulesco thrust upon you by way of retaliation. His memory of you, after twenty years, should be seen in its true perspective. The fellow loved you, never mind if he did marry your sister; she was near to the rose he wanted; he paid you the compliment of sending his orphan daughter to your care. I must come and see the young lady. Will you give me lunch on Sunday if I drive out?”

“How kind, Edward; that is just what I hoped you would suggest.”

Lord Westhaughton took his cousin down to her carriage. As she mounted the steps, let down by the footman, he cast his criticizing eyes over her handsome bay horses.

“Smith,” addressing the portly bewigged coachman, “they do you credit; I like them better than the greys.”

“Thank you, m’lord. We use the greys in the morning and the bays in the afternoons. Once a day into London is enough for a pair.”

“What are you using for night work?”

“The dark browns. Good, steady hosses; take no notice of buses or link-men—nice steady pair.”

“I like your bays best,” he repeated, smacking admiringly the flank of the horse nearest to the kerb.

“By the way, Smith, I’m running Cossack at Goodwood.”

“Glad to hear it, m’lord. Good luck I My nephew told me the stables thought ‘twas likely.”

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Westhaughton stood back from the carriage.

“I am admiring your horses,” he told his cousin.  
“Good-bye; see you Sunday.”

She leant forward—

“You chose those horses for me at Tattersails.”

He laughed.

“So I did. Gave a stiffish price for ’em.”

“Four hundred pounds, m’lord.” The reminder came from the occupant of the box-seat.

“So I did. Somerville ran me up—wanted them for ’my lady.” He waved his hand. “See you Sunday, Julia.”

The carriage rolled away across Berkeley Square into Grosvenor Square, and along Edgware Road to Hampstead. Buses, four-wheeled cabs and hansoms were outdistanced by her splendid bays, heading for their distant stables at Belit Place.

Sitting in her highly-swung barouche, Miss Julia, a dignified, handsome woman, pondered many things. How little the streets and squares had changed since her girlhood days. Hers had been a happy youth, secure in her father’s affection—needed by him as the mistress of his household; the first discordant note struck by the hot pursuit of her Austrian-Polish suitor. Without that disturbing period to give colour and purpose to her brilliant young womanhood, her past had been a succession of agreeable events in an unimportant existence. Kritzulesco thrust upon her attention the meaning of a woman’s existence; to be desired, to be pursued, to endure the nearness of the hot flame of a passion with the imperturbability of a well-bred young

lady of position. Across the space of years between their first meeting and the advent of his daughter, there flowed afresh the anguish of her rejection; his tortured eyes gazing into hers and reading in their cold dislike his greatest mortification.

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He had no power to touch her affections. The mystery of her disinclinations forever eluded his understanding. Remembering that painful moment, when accepting her refusal as final, he had turned and left her standing in the centre of her cousin's drawing-room, she shivered. For him that moment meant tragedy. For her the cessation of attentions from an undesired suitor. Was it, at long last, pity for the man which moved her now? By death removed from the planet whereon she dwelt, she might permit herself to bestow upon his memory the convulsive tremor of regret. No more; no less. Rejected, he was still a factor in her life; not a suppliant but a dictator. She sensed his secret smile behind that realization. Being dead, he yet lived in Lycanthia; nearer now than in those other days when she could pass him by and so escape from what was distasteful.

Entering the Chinese-room on her return from London, her mind engrossed with disturbing recollections, the sight of the lithe figure of her niece plunged her more deeply into the recognition of the dead man's power over her life—even from beyond the grave.

Yes, Lycanthia was striking. About her small, narrow head, her pointed ears—almost too large for beauty, her deep-set eyes surmounted by thick brows meeting in an unbroken line about her nose, hung an indefinable atmosphere of personality, at once dominating and

secretive; an ageless wisdom of understanding concealed from the elder woman's perception.

Unwillingly Miss Julia realized her impotence to guide this young life as she saw it. Forty-six and seventeen. What knowledge was it which, in passing by had left her a touch of youth's halo to gild her fancies, while to Lycanthia there was nothing but the hard realities of life's illusions?

As the girl turned to greet her, she imagined for

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one fleeting moment, those pale, red-rimmed eyes showed comprehension. But comprehension of what? This supposition was disturbing.

Lycanthia spoke first.

"Did you enjoy your drive, auntie?"

"I did not go for pleasure, but on business. The streets were crowded and dusty; there is a shortage of water, and the watering-carts only attend to the great thoroughfares. No, it was not an agreeable drive." She laid down her parasol, removing her gloves as she talked. "How did you amuse yourself?"

"My luggage arrived from the docks so Maga began unpacking. I explored your house, and now you are back, I have a request to make." She watched her aunt closely, mentally forcing compliance as she outlined her desires. "May I have those four empty rooms in your west wing—at least, Mrs. Scott described them as the 'west wing rooms'? You do not like Dlugoss, poor dear! he could have the run of the enclosed garden below those rooms, and the iron outside staircase from the sitting-rooms could be used by him."

Miss Julia hesitated. The proposal had advantages — yet she did not like it. Occupation of the four rooms

would separate Lycanthia and her maid and dog from the household—too much so, especially as she was inclined to use her liberty from supervision in directions Miss Julia felt she could not approve.

“You would be isolated up there,” she murmured.

“But how good for Maga and Dlugoss! You will not be annoyed by seeing them in the hall. They can enter and leave by the outside stairs and the little garden door.”

The persuasiveness of the young girl weakened Miss Julia’s resolution.

“Those rooms have not been used for years; the furniture is old; there are no carpets, no curtains. You could not be comfortable there.”

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“We would. We do not need all this luxury,” waving her hand round the handsomely arranged morning-room. “Give us bare boards which Maga will scrub and keep clean. Dark curtains for the windows, a bed for me, the leather couch and skin rug for Maga, the tables and chairs already there will suffice.”

“My dear Lycanthia, you talk like a savage! My niece to live in such surroundings. Bethink yourself, this is not Poland! This is civilized England.”

Lycanthia laughed, a low, deep note which held no joy in it.

“You would find much luxury in Poland in some houses, but not in my father’s. The graciousness of life ceased for him when he went to Schloss Kornenbourg. He said so! For him were the husks of the acorns left by the swine in the forests.”

“Yet being here, Lycanthia, you must conform to surroundings I think suitable for my niece.”

Miss Julia's voice was gentle. Persuasiveness would serve her better than an exhibition of authority; moreover she was not anxious to discuss Kritzulesco with his daughter. Being dead he yet lived anew in her daily conversation, and each mention of his name impinged itself with an ever-increasing force on Miss Julia's emotions.

"You must not think me a savage, auntie, only I have no taste for rich furnishings. I love dogs and horses, riding, hunting, the free air of the hills and the forests; I should die in closed rooms and houses." A note of real feeling crept into her hard, young voice; the first hint she had given of possessing any. Miss Julia welcomed it as an opening for influencing her niece in the direction of her wishes.

"We must compromise over this, Lycanthia," she said. "You shall have those rooms for Maga and your dog; he can roam about as he pleases in the enclosed garden below. You must keep your own

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pretty bedroom, and its furnishing shall be arranged according to your taste."

Lycanthia watched her aunt, moodily pondering the proposal, which obviously was not altogether to her liking; she decided to agree, a first move towards securing the whole, for she intended to carry her point when a favourable moment arrived.

"How conventional you are, auntie," she said, "as though it matters how much furniture I have in my bedroom." Suddenly she jumped to her feet, stretching her long arms above her head. "How strange my careless father should so devastate his life because he could not join it to your English decorum."

Miss Julia turned away her head, avoiding the half-mocking smile on Lycanthia's face. This constant repetition of the distasteful theme was steadily rousing a deep resentment certain to find vent in the near future. She said:

"Our cousin, Edward, Lord Westhaughton, is lunching with us on Sunday. He rides and hunts and shoots, so you must discuss all those pursuits which interest you with him."

"I have numbers of English relations, I suppose?" Lycanthia's voice was tepidly interested; men, as men, had not begun to trouble her young femininity. Excursions into the secret places of the human soul were part of the peasant lore, too freely imparted by her foster-mother, but which divided her youth from her English aunt's maturity.

"Yes, your mother's relations—for you are half English, Lycanthia."

The girl dropped her eyes.

"I wonder how my English ancestry will show itself?" Miss Julia was at a loss for a convincing—even a suitable reply.

"Time will show," was all she could find to say.

“The highest goes hand in hand with the lowest. It is only the commonplace who walks at a distance.”

TAGORE.

“Since ever must the blast of death blow out the lamp of life.”

GHAZEL.



## CHAPTER V

### DLUGOSS THE DOG

WELL, what do you think of her?" asked Miss Julia of her cousin as they sat in her drawing-room after luncheon on the Sunday afternoon.

Lord Westhaughton hesitated. Rising from his chair he advanced to the hearth-rug, and standing before the flower and fem-filled fire-place, thoughtfully considered the tip of his half-smoked cigar.

"Difficult to say," he conceded at last. "Unusual, decidedly. Mature in a fashion I cannot place—yet young through a lack of social experience. Very sure of herself and satisfied with her personal outlook on life." Again he paused. "If you gain her affections she might be influenced. Yet again—I do not know. In fact, dear Juba, I have no advice to offer. I feel up against a something which intentionally eludes my understanding."

"Metaphors will not help me."

"Of course not—but at present they are all I can offer. A pity she did not remain in Poland among the people she understands and who doubtless understand her. What rather disturbs me is—how will she occupy herself?"

"I must get her a horse—two in fact, as we have nothing suitable for a groom to ride."

"Wish me to see about that?"

"It would be kind, Edward."

“Expect that girl can ride almost anything. Look at her hands and wrists”—he broke off his remarks to watch Lycanthia leading her great hound across the lawn.

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“New Cousin Edward,” she called, “I bring my Dlugoss to make acquaintance.”

“Bring him in, if he is permitted access to the drawing-room.”

Steadily he looked at the dog, who for a moment returned his regard.

“An unusual dog,” he said slowly, “he can focus; he is an individual; he must be intelligent. Is he good-tempered?”

“An angel.” The figure of speech was intended to be complimentary.

“I have no acquaintance with those legendary personages.” Westhaughton’s dry tone signified disinclination to accept the description. “To me, he looks a formidable creature; what do you call him?”

“Dlugoss.”

“Polish, of course. Say plain Douglas, and then we can all pronounce it.”

Lycanthia bent over her dog, murmuring some rapid words which she stressed. Drawing back, she loosened his collar; he walked across the room and raising his right paw, extended it to Lord Westhaughton. Impelled by the suggestion of friendliness, Westhaughton shook the paw; neither repelled, nor agreeably impressed by the unusual incident.

The hound immediately returned to Lycanthia.

“Is this the dog you mentioned?” Westhaughton inquired of his cousin, a silent spectator of the scene.

Miss Julia nodded assent.

“Well,” said her cousin hesitatingly, “he may be all you say, but he strikes me as not a suitable dog for a young lady. He must require constant exercise and plenty of it.”

Lycanthia looked at her aunt.

“Auntie has promised me a horse for riding, it is here Dlugoss will go with me. He is as swift over the ground as a stable-fed horse.”

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“I will see about a couple of horses next week.”

“Two will be better than one. May I come and assist in the choosing?”

“I did not promise that. But when I see something suitable they will be sent here for you to try.”

Westhaughton had little difficulty in securing four animals for Lycanthia’s inspection. Nor did she hesitate over her choice, when, within the week he had stipulated for finding them, they were brought to Belit Place. She selected a light chestnut, about sixteen hands high, with a long, steady action, promising swift going over the country-side.

Her second choice was an iron-grey with a long head and a nose generally termed “Roman”—but with a swinging gallop and tendency to rush his fences.

Miss Julia, almost as good a judge of a horse as Westhaughton or her coachman, made no objection to the iron-grey, but was decidedly dubious as to the suitability of the chestnut.

“Too nervous for a lady to ride, and his mouth too light,” she said. “The slightest forgetfulness on your part, Lycanthia, and he might swerve anywhere.”

“But forgetfulness in riding, auntie, is not a fault of mine. I have ridden all my life, from dawn to dusk, and over much more difficult country than I see here.”

The short display she gave of her mastery over the horses silenced Miss Julia, who recognized her efficiency when she saw it. She was generous also, purchasing three of the horses, the chestnut, the grey and a dark brown, all well matched for speed.

The two weeks which intervened between Lycanthia’s arrival at Hampstead and her aunt’s departure for Scotland gave her an opportunity of testing the merits of the new acquisitions.

She rode every day, going for miles over the undulating country between Hampstead and St. Albans,

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accompanied by Dlugoss and an elderly groom. The latter was frequently, and eventually intentionally, left miles behind, nor did this depend on the animal he rode.

Once Lycanthia was astride her horse (she rode in voluminous breeches, buttoned tightly from knee to ankles) she became part of it; her mind guided the beast, forcing out of it the last ounce of energy.

And no matter how recklessly she rode, the great hound raced beside her.

There were angry mutterings in the stable anent the heated condition in which she brought her horse back.

These complaints did not reach Miss Julia, as Lycanthia dismounted in the stable-yard. The coachman ventured a mild reprimand one morning while superintending the unsaddling of the chestnut whose lathery coat was dark with sweat.

“Taking too much out of ‘un, miss,” he said. “’E’s fair trembling as he stands. Use ‘im a bit gentler.”

“I ride to please myself,” she answered curtly, “he goes no faster than my dog. Give him more com.”

Meditatively the man looked the horse over.

“You’ve used ‘im cruel this morning, miss. You’ll break ‘is spirit with such goings on.”

Swiftly she turned.

“What do you mean? Rub him down and give him a feed.” She moved nearer to the horse, the animal sprang away, almost freeing himself from the halter.

“Easy, easy,” she said quietly. “Good horse.”

But her blandishments failed to reassure the animal.

“Throw ‘is blanket over ‘im and take ‘im in,” ordered the irate coachman. “Shall you ride this evening, miss?”

“Yes, at six o’clock.”

“The chestnut won’t be fit to go out again.”

“I’ll take the grey.”

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“Timmins can’t ride the brown. ‘E won’t be fit to go out again if ‘e’s bin used as the chestnut.”

“I left Timmins far behind. You should look for him at the Spaniard’s Inn yard.” Her voice was scornful, “I bade him stay there until he saw me return.”

"It's 'is dooty, miss, to follow you when you rides. If 'e does so far forgit 'isself as to bide at The Spaniard's—well, all I can say is, 'e won't do for this establishment."

As Lycanthia left the stables the delinquent Timmins rode in. Abjectly he looked first at the resolute young lady whose orders he had not dared to disregard, then at the no less indignant autocrat of the stable-yard.

"Back a bit late, ain't ye?" was the inquiry shot at him.

Timmins nodded slyly at the retreating lady.

"According to borders," he ventured his defence.

"Come, the truth now."

"Well, that's the truth. She told me to ease hoff a bit; not to follow 'er and 'er dog, 'e'd look after 'er, but to get a pint at The Spaniard's and stick around there till I seed 'er riding back. So I did. I'd like to know what else I could a' done."

His argument was unanswerable. Mr. Smith frowned, but forbore to criticize the young lady's arrangements with one of his underlings.

"About 'ow many miles did you go?"

"So fur as The Spaniard's—as I were instructed; a 'alf mile I call it."

"And you aren't far out. That's why your hoss is so fresh. The lady wants the hosses again at six o'clock."

Timmins looked startled.

"But what about me? What's the use of me ariding after 'er up the lane to The Spaniard's and then a-moving me hoss about fur a hour or more in the yard?"

"I'll ride meself. She can't well horder me to stop at The Spaniard's." Dignified assurance lent weight to Smith's announcement. Timmins's mouth opened to express audible disbelief—then shut—after all let Smith find out his mistake. The lady might be young and a foreigner, but she wam't so easy to say no to. So meditating he led his horse into the stall.

"Us'll see what us shall see," he told him confidentially. "Miss Lycanthia isn't a lady to cross. No, I'll lay me lucky she aren't."

When Lycanthia went out to mount for her evening ride and found Smith prepared to accompany her, she made no remark, partly because its portent escaped her understanding, and partly because she had not realized his authority in the stables.

In his youth Smith had been a noted horseman, riding light and accompanying his late master to all the county hunts, but age and increased weight had disposed him to the more sedentary repose on the box-seat of his employer's carriage, though occasionally he tried Miss Julia's new hacks, to satisfy himself as to their suitability.

If Lycanthia's intention had been to ride alone as in the morning, Smith gave her no opportunity. Fast she rode, but he rode with her, never allowing her to shorten the regulation distance between a lady and her escort.

His account of that evening's outing to Mrs. Smith was brief.

"She rode like hell, but where she went I followed. Who sweated most, me or the horses, I don't know, but no Spaniard's Inn for me."

“Shall you mention it to Miss Julia?”

“I may. Perhaps the young lady will rein in a bit — find out she can’t ride in Herts same as she did in Poland.”

Lycanthia mentioned Smith’s disapproval of her

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riding to her aunt the same evening. She was jocular over it.

“You see, auntie, I’m shocking your English servants. This morning I left the groom, with the name of Timmins, behind in a comfortable resting place.”

“You mean, he fell off,” hastily suggested Miss Julia.

“No, I do not. I advised him to wait at the foreign inn as his horse was too slow to go with me.”

“But,” said Miss Julia slowly, “surely you do not ride alone. Besides, the grooms are not permitted to remain at an inn when accompanying a lady riding” — she hesitated; such disregard for ordinary social conventions could not pass without reproof. Yet— was the girl so much to blame, growing up in such a household as Castle Kornenbourg? This reflection checked her rising resentment. As she hesitated, Lycanthia continued—

“But your head coachman, Smith, went with me this evening, so I was well-behaved. His figure would not easily accustom itself to a rapid gallop. We rode with propriety.”

Miss Julia looked at her. Was Lycanthia serious or was she quietly amusing herself? Miss Julia realized



her incompetence to influence this erratic niece, un-English in all she said and did.

Suddenly she regretted the early demise of that niece's father. How events alter a mental outlook! Never before had she regretted the absence of her brother-in-law from her sphere of life! Yet, decidedly she did so now.

She sighed.

"Lycanthia," she said gently, "try and conform to our English customs. It may be difficult at first, but you are still young enough to change your Polish habits when such are not *convenable* in your new surroundings."

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Something in her aunt's voice touched the emotional soul of the girl. She blinked her eyes rapidly.

"Auntie, I must ride! Something here," she struck her breast an almost violent blow, "will not let me rest. I must move—fast—then faster—always forward into the '*Ewigkeit*' as Goethe says, but I never get there! Why should I take your servants with me?"

"You are too young to ride alone. Many young persons are prone to restlessness, but they control it."

The girl's eyes contracted oddly for a moment. Its significance escaped Miss Julia's observation. Anxious to establish a more confidential understanding with her orphan niece, she restricted her reproof to—

"Well, Lycanthia, try. In a short time you and I go north to Sutherlandshire on a visit to some cousins.

There you can ride and fish and live an outdoor life as you did in Poland.”

“Do Dlugoss and Maga go also?”

“No, that would be impossible. Your maid and the dog will remain here.”

Lycanthia got up from her seat, excitedly she extracted a cigarette from her case and lighted it; her voice was hoarsely disturbed.

“Why, auntie, all my life Maga has been with me,” she hesitated.

Miss Julia was quite firm.

“I am sorry to cause you a little disappointment, but you must see how impossible it is to take your great hound with us on country visits.”

Lycanthia did not attempt to contradict her aunt’s remark. It was reasonable although she hated its application to the routine of her daily life.

Miss Julia went on, speaking evenly:

“My maid will give you all the attention you require.”

“Poor Maga; poor Dlugoss I” murmured Lycanthia.

“Two months will quickly pass—for you and for them.

Besides, it is well you should visit your English relations, since, for the present, you are to live in England.”

Meditatively Lycanthia considered this. Up to the present she had not looked into the future. Her father’s activities had formed the background of her days. His strenuousness—the outcome of his ravaged emotions

— banished stagnation from their daily lives. Each day had its directions—sometimes far afield—at others in a crowded festivity plentifully bedewed with the potent wines and spirits Kritzulesco so abundantly provided. Her father's reactions were as stimulating as his planned amusements. She had been bred and born in a fever of nervous tension, it was her natural atmosphere. The quietude of her aunt's tranquil home smothered her, body and soul. In these early days a natural curiosity hid the actual fact from full comprehension, but she sensed it. Restlessly she moved up and down the long, narrow room; the smoke from her cigarette trailing behind. Her aunt watched her, concealing her distaste for the offending cigarette smoke in her drawing-room in an heroic self-denial unsuspected by her niece.

“Life in England is different,” she said at last; “maybe, I shall never fit into it.” She sighed. “It will be difficult.”

“I will endeavour to make it easier for you, Lycanthia.” Miss Julia's voice was very low. “Your mother was not restless as a girl.”

“But I am my father's daughter,” Lycanthia laughed harshly. “I cannot see him in a house like this. Ah! auntie, had you married him, you, too, would have learned to love our wild, free life among our forests and our vast plains, not the pretty garden country of this snug little England.” Her voice changed to a wailing cry of regret. Its animal timbre startled Miss Julia.

“My dear child!” she exclaimed.

Lycanthia paused in her restless walk, looking down

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on her aunt from her slim height, her figure almost boyish in its flat outline.

“Do not stop me riding,” she begged urgently. “I must ride; I must get away from myself.”

Pityingly her aunt looked at her, asking herself if submission to the changed conditions of her life would come easily. She avoided answering her own question.

The arrangement for a series of autumn visits for Miss Julia and herself were confided to Maga the same evening by Lycanthia.

“It is so adjusted,” she said. “My aunt and I go to Scotland to give me the pleasure of meeting some of my English and Scottish cousins. My aunt considers these introductions necessary—so we go.”

“And me?” queried the maid anxiously.

“Ah, you and Dlugoss remain in this house. It is best so. Acquaint yourself with the neighbourhood, for there is much of interest; dense woodlands for the heat of summer and the fresh country air across the fields between here and St. Albans.”

The woman pursed up her lips.

“This place does not please me. I stifle in the fenced-in garden. Surely this is the home of the chicken-hearted!” Her voice rose in a wail. “Ah me, ah me, why did we come?”

“Because we must,” her young mistress answered harshly, “it was my father’s will. You know that, so

why question what must be. Until I am twenty-one, here must I abide. That is his law.”

“Unless you marry,” suggested the watching maid.

“There is no suitor I could fancy. And that you know—with many other of my thoughts and fears. It is arranged my aunt and I go to Scotland, and you bide here with Dlugoss.”

“The whim of God,” affirmed the woman scornfully, her white eyelashes flickering above her secretive eyes.

“‘Tis but a merry quip, m’lud.  
The heave of a tricky stall  
Soaked in the vat of a vinegary gulph—  
A hiccup! which lets out the gall.”

“But I lifts me ’and, quite hinnocent like  
And I says—‘ ’Tis a blooming ‘ell  
Which strangles a man and shoves ‘im down  
When ’e’s only his ale to sell.’

“Fur it’s just like this—and don’t ’ee forget  
In a land the Jokers calls ‘free’  
Ye mayn’t turn a penny of honesty’s pelf  
Wiv’out paying ’er Majesty’s fee,  
They calls it collecting the revenue taxes,  
I calls it tarnation and devildom’s axes.”

NAT. COCKSPUR.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE IRISHMAN'S CASTLE

**O**PPPOSITE to the Spaniard's Inn, but with an open space between it and the road, stood a dilapidated hostelry known as the Flying Jade. Legend credited Hogarth with the painting of its signboard, and when the present owner repainted and otherwise refurbished the squalid outside of the inn, he gave the legend the benefit of the doubt and with due regard to the commercial value of the pictured damsel, had the old signboard cleaned and varnished, and fitted into the space between the mantelshelf and ceiling in the coffee-room. For years it was shown to frequenters of the inn as the work of the celebrated artist, but the new owner, Nat Cockspur, preferred to rename his property a little more in keeping with his ambitions. A local plumber undertook the depicting of a traditional Irishman in small clothes and worsted stockings, astride a diminutive castellated building, and Nat Cockspur named the renovated tavern the Irishman's Castle.

At first his neighbours credited Nat with an Irish ancestry, but truth and a sure knowledge a native from the Emerald Isle would not be a welcome dweller on the heights of respectable Hampstead, brought a decisive denial.

"Devil a bit of Irish in me," he said "My father was a Yorkshire tyke and my mother a girl from Norwich."

And voluble though he was, this brief account of his ancestry was the only intimate detail he gave.

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It was nobody's business but his own if the Yorkshire tyke and the Norwich girl omitted to register their marriage, or bind themselves to the stabilization of a tie which was severed by the boy's birth. Until Nat was sixteen he lived at Yarmouth with his mother. She earned her living in ways known only to a woman with a baby to keep. Being skilful with her hands it was not a bad living and Nat had little cause to be disgruntled with his upbringing—rough, but never hungry.

A Swedish captain, looking for a companion and a cook, induced Nat's mother to steam away with him into the misty waters of the North Sea, and she never came back to Yarmouth.

Nat drifted to London, coming to anchor near Gravesend as potman in a small inn. Until he was thirty years of age he worked at various public-houses up and down the river front. Through the lucky find of a hidden cache of stolen money behind the grate of a water-side house, marked for pulling down, Nat Cockspur turned his back on Gravesend and a potman's job, blossoming out at Hampstead as the landlord of the Irishman's Castle.

A year later he married. Again curiosity raised its head as to the maiden name and previous abode of Mrs. Nat Cockspur. Legitimate inquiries were easily satisfied. Her home was at Goring-on-Thames; her parents both dead and she, the (unacknowledged) responsibility of aged grandparents.



“A bit of a natural, that girl,” said her grandmother sadly. “Who’ll fend for her when we’re gone?”

Dread of the unknown future moved them to an unwilling consent when Nat Cockspur “offered” for their granddaughter. The inertia of old age disposed them to accept his account of himself. Certainly the

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owner landlord of an inn at Hampstead was as good a suitor as they could expect for their orphan granddaughter, docile through lack of mental vigour, and likely all her life to require “a hand over her.”

Nat Cockspur had seen Melitia Smart walking down the village street at Goring behind her grandfather. A simple incident yet destined to turn her into a wife and as the years slipped by—mother of eight children.

His marriage was as secret as most of his doings. One fine Monday morning he rode away from the Irishman’s Castle on a young horse, purchased at Goring, broken by him for the saddle and successfully sold to a “city gent” for riding in Rotten Row.

On the Saturday night he returned in a dilapidated hackney coach driven out from London behind two shambling old horses. From its musty interior he handed out a frightened-looking young woman whom he addressed as Melitia.

“This lady is Mrs. Cockspur,” he said to the astonished potman. “Courtied and wedded in a week, though I had my eye on her for a twelvemonth. To-day I fetched her home.”

Melitia made no remark, passing into the murky lamplight of the open bar uncommenting, her eyes fixed on the toes of her shoes.

Her cottage-shaped bonnet, wreathed in a veil of bridal white, concealed her indefinite features and short-sighted eyes. A cheap Paisley shawl, wrapped loosely round her narrow shoulders, gave size to a figure still undeveloped and shorn of grace. On the threshold she stumbled.

“Gee up,” encouraged her husband. “Pick up yer feet and go pretty, my lass. No shying back from yer dooties, Mrs. Cockspur—else a cock’s spur you’ll get.”

His pleasantry passed unheeded. The new wife

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followed him quietly, first into the coffee-room, then into the bar-parlour, finally finding her way to the kitchen to the amazement of its two female occupants.

The curt introduction vouchsafed by Cockspur as to the identity of his companion, stirred curiosity in the inn’s staff. But he was not a man who encouraged familiarities.

“Yer new mistress,” he announced. “You, Sally, show the bedroom.”

The new mistress was as taciturn as the master was loquacious. In silence she entered her husband’s house, following him as a beaten dog slinks after his master. What her thoughts were no one knew. Her quiet features, downcast eyes, hushed voice and noiseless movements offended none—but baffled all in its self-effacement. She did not seem unhappy. She ate with

relish the roughly-served food provided, never argued with, or opposed her husband. By his orders she attended the Sunday morning service at St. Mary's, soberly clad in a black dress, Paisley shawl, and a brown net veil decorously draped over her coal-scuttle bonnet.

"The folks from Jack Straw's Castle do go regular," he told her, "so for the sake of custom we can't lag behind." Silently she acquiesced; he did not discuss with her the spiritual benefits possible to be received, nor did she intrude on him her ideas—if she had any. He was not curious, he did not require from her companionship, only the ordinary duties of a housekeeper and bedfellow. In neither post was she a success. The Irishman's Castle was famed only for its whisky, and on its sale depended the balanced side of its accounts. The coffee-room was frequented by the modest sort of travellers who did not wish to expend more than eightpence for a meal or fourpence for a "glass." The prosperous, or those bound for Hendon,

chose Jack Straw's Castle as a "stand-off" or for a good meal, and Nat Cockspur was shrewd enough to know he could not compete with the larger inn.

Moreover, he was often away. "On business," he said. "Smelling my way to the best poteen, either in London or Dublin."

It was no one's interest to dispute his doings; his wife had neither time nor inclination, for during the twelve years of their married life she produced five anaemic-looking little girls and three low-browed,

furtive-eyed boys, whose bearing and rearing wore out such stamina as she had. She died when the youngest was six months old, and Sally, the cook, then a woman of fifty, was forced by circumstances into the dead wife's place—and responsibilities.

The overflowing tavern nursery and its consequent discomforts, sobered for some weeks Nat Cockspur's casual focus on life. Inconvenienced he certainly was by his wife's untimely slipping away from life and her family duties, and to the end of his days he cherished a grudge against her.

Sally was not as complaisant as he had hoped to find her.

"Seven childer under twelve and not me own is a bit of a burden for a woman to carry," she told Cockspur. "It's Sally here and Sally there—as cheeky as you please, and if I'm to act as a mother, well! I'll be treated a bit more gently."

The passing weeks brought no easement of these domestic difficulties. Sally did her work interspersed with groans.

"'Tis cruel 'ard for a woman to mother children with no gold ring on her finger." Or to the children, "Pretty dears, you ought to have a mother—so you did, and not poor old Sally who's neither fish nor fowl—only a dried-up old 'erring."

Sally's complaints rang true to listeners beyond the tavern walls. Sympathy stabled its uncertain measure with her. Nat Cockspur was no Adonis! His tavern, an abode of disorder, offered no temptation to unattached

females. By degrees Sally created an atmosphere of expectation round her activities which suggestively propelled Cockspur towards St. Mary's and a wedding-ring for her work-worn finger.

Yet he hesitated. A willing, middle-aged woman, past child-bearing, and eight troublesome, motherless children were reasons enough for the parson's blessing, but his hesitant attitude exasperated Sally and bewildered her friends. To their unbiased view he was no matrimonial catch. The Irishman's Castle provided a poor livelihood for a man and eight children. Was the suffix "Mrs." a sufficient reward for embarking on a general servant's never-ceasing grind? Sally did not investigate these facts. Her mental aspirations could not rise above the longed-for wedding-ring and a settled position among her sister-women.

By degrees Nat Cockspur slipped and slithered down the all too easy matrimonial lane whose lych-gate opened into St. Mary's sacred precincts; but at the gate he slunk back—he could not take the fateful step.

One cold October morning ushered in momentous happenings for Nat Cockspur and Sally the cook, and the full nursery of little Cockspurs.

A big, full-bosomed woman, showily dressed in an orange-coloured dress and brown parti-coloured shawl, her gaudy silk bonnet plentifully bedecked in pink and yellow flowers, was driven up to the tavern door in an open light cart, full of children and bundles.

Heavy-footed she clambered down from her seat by the driver, facing round to meet the potman who came out to receive her order.

“Master at home?” she asked truculently.

“Do you mean the landlord?”

“I mean Nat Cockspur, owner of this inn.”

“Oh, oi, he’s somewheres about”; then habit caused him to inquire—“what can I serve you with?”

“Neither bite not sup till I’ve seen Mr. Landlord,” she retorted. Then, changing her tone, “Say, how long’s the late Mrs. Cockspur bin laid away?”

“Best part of a year.” The potman was impelled by her dominance to answer questions he rather resented.

“I don’t think!” she snorted. Her personal meaning escaped him.

“Nobody asked you to. ’Tain’t none of your business. Come now, what’ll I serve you with? I can’t stand jawing all the morning.”

“You don’t seem cluttered up with custom,” was her scornful comment, “but keep your hair on, young man. Just you look up your disappearing landlord and tell him Betsy Smallpiece, soon to be Mrs. Nat Cockspur the second, and his six hungry children from Gravesend are waiting on his front doorstep to give him a loving greeting.”

The potman gazed at her, a variety of superficial emotions paralysing his tongue.

She advanced to the open door.

“Gar on, ole man. I shan’t bite you.”

The figure of Nat Cockspur slowly propelling its horror-stricken self in her direction provoked her to a fresh tornado of words.

“You’re a nice one, you are,” she ejaculated, intently watching the slow approach of her target, “trying to sneak out of your promises. Just like you; I

should have had better sense! Why,” pointing a massive finger at the abashed potman endeavouring to slip into a background not easily

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discernible, “he’s a chip of his master—wouldn’t answer questions—tried to put me off. No use, young man!”

Nat Cockspur came out into the open. He was cornered; his only course was submission, but she had forced his hand to her own disadvantage.

“Come along in, Betsy,” he said, not unkindly. “Pity you couldn’t ’a’ waited a bit till I had time to fix things.”

“Time indeed,” she retorted, “and your lawful wife dead near a twelvemonth. Didn’t you promise to make an honest woman of me if ever she hopped the twig?”

“I did, Betsy, I did.” His voice, tuned to a soothing note ran off her indignation without effect.

“Here,” addressing his interested potman, “get those children out of the cart and into the coffee-room, and send the man and horses round to the yard.”

“Be they going to stay?”

“Yes, young man, they be,” announced the warlike lady, “I’ve brought them home to their rightful father.”

“Perhaps I’d better call Sally,” ventured the potman, watching his master’s face. Quick misgiving flashed across his vision. What would Sally say to this startling apparition from Gravesend?

“Who’s Sally?” inquired the truculent lady.

“Oh, she was the cook; now she tends to the house and children.”

“Umph! sort of housekeeper, I suppose. I knows the sort.” Swiftly she turned on Nat Cockspur. “Where’s she sleep?” she asked.

He coloured, hardened though he was to female tantrums.

“Along of the children,” he mumbled.

“Well, I’ll look her over before she has to do with mine.”

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The egress of Sally herself into the group before the inn provided a sudden solving of several difficulties.

“Here is Sally,” said Cockspur.

Miss Betsy Smallpiece looked at her with interest. Instinct told her here was the “other woman” whose propinquity to the widowed innkeeper threatened her rights as the mother of his left-hand family. Sally was a quick thinker; she guessed the meaning of the handsome stranger’s invasion of the Irishman’s Castle, accompanied by a bunch of children crowded into a cart.

“Yes, here I be, sure enough,” she said decidedly, running her eyes over the orange and brown clad stranger.

“I’ll answer that,” interrupted Cockspur. Subterfuge could not avail nor hide from local curiosity the truth of this morning’s doings. “Take those children into the coffee-room and stay there till I come.”

The command was addressed to that person who was willing to receive it. Sally was not. She determined to face it out. The potman decided he was best out of what promised to be a rousing scene.



Cockspur faced the two women.

“Come along into the office,” he said. “We’ll have it to ourselves.”

They followed him in; closing the door, he put his back against it.

“See here, Sally, I never promised to marry you.”

“That’s true, but I expected it.”

“Well,” pointing to the garishly-attired stranger who, with her back to the window, was intently watching the perspiring man against the door, “that’s the future Mrs. Cockspur—right by nature and right by choice. Betsy, me gal, you’re the one women I’ve really cared for, and if I’ve hung back a bit—well, it’s because I couldn’t see a way clear to account for all

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those children without letting the cat out of the bag about you.”

“Well! I call that real handsome of you, Cockspur,” she simpered, “but I ain’t a thought-reader and when I ’eard, quite by accident, from Tommy Yeast, that your missis had been dead for months I got a bit uneasy. Who wouldn’t I’d like to know?” She tossed her head defiantly. “So I came along to make me claim.”

He held out his hand.

“All serene, ole gal. We’d best get spliced, right and proper, down at Gravesend.”

Sally interrupted these fond confidences.

“So that’s settled,” she said, “and I’ll be going. No serving under a mistress for me, ‘specially one who got five children without a wedding-ring on her finger.”

Miss Smallpiece rose to the occasion.

“Now, Miss Sally,” she purred, “let’s be friends. Cockspur and me have bin acquainted nigh on twelve years.”

“Same ‘ere,” retorted Sally, “only I didn’t sleep with ‘im; ’im a married man an all.”

“There wasn’t any need to with a wife on the premises.” Miss Smallpiece was unable to swallow the retort as it rose to her lips.

Cockspur moved from before the door. The atmosphere in the room became sulphurous. He feared an emotional explosion.

“Can’t I persuade you to stay on, Sally? You’ll be a real loss to the children.”

“Don’t ask her, Mr. Cockspur. ’Tain’t natural she should want to stay. I aren’t a man-sharer with any woman.”

“Liar!” screamed Sally. “What about yerself? Look at yer brats—living witnesses of man-sharing.

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Their eight little brothers and sisters can’t be explained away.”

Throwing open the door, Cockspur thrust the indignant woman into the passage.

“Wait in the kitchen, Sally, till I come along and pay you,” he said.

The shock had shaken Sally’s half-century-old physique; she burst into tears and hurried away.

Turning back into the room Cockspur remarked dubiously: “Well! This is a pretty kettle of fish.”

Miss Smallpiece tossed her head.

“It’s all along of your slyness. All you had to do was to ‘ave passed the word then I’d ‘ave known where I was. However, here I am and here I stays.”

Which she did, but the marriage arrangements were not concluded for three months, and as they were married by banns, Cockspur shook in his shoes every Sunday morning until he knew his right to make Betsy Smallpiece his wife had not been challenged in the Church.

Betsy Smallpiece’s inclusion in his life was due to the mistake he made in marrying a woman he fancied because of a “strangeness” which intrigued his ignorance without touching his heart. Until he turned into The Sailor’s Joy at Gravesend one wet night and was served with hot grog by Betsy, head barmaid in charge, he had not known he possessed that emotional appendage. The attraction was mutual. He cared in his rough way too much for her, to deceive her. He owned he was married and lived in his own inn at Hampstead; that his wife was young and a prolific child-bearer. Betsy took him as he was and during the eleven years of their acquaintance, bore him six children; two pairs of twins quickly running up a large family. Their curious relationship was not unhappy, but the burden of supporting her family was

entirely hers. Cockspur had difficulty in paying his way at Hampstead and had seldom more than a few shillings to give her each month.

Betsy’s dramatic appearance at The Irishman’s Castle determined the course of events for them all. He

was not sorry to see her, though he regretted the exposure consequent on her appearance. But thinking the position over carefully he realized those six young children, four so like him in feature and stature, would take a lot of explaining. Regretfully he resigned himself to the natural detractions poured out on him by those of his neighbours who knew the story. Betsy, as mistress or as his wife, proved her innate capacity for fighting her own battles. She worked in divers ways to achieve this; in a year the gloss of twelve months threw a veil of charity over so much that was to their mutual discredit.

Later, tragic happenings at The Irishman's Castle buried for all time the moral laxity of the Gravesend years.

Housing so many children was not easy in a tavern of such limited dimensions as The Irishman's Castle. Cockspur solved the difficulty by purchasing from the Great Western Railway two old, disused third-class carriages. These were placed end to end on one side of the stable-yard, and a communicating door knocked out where the carriages touched. The carriage farthest away was turned into a bedroom for the brood of little girls, who passed through their brothers' carriage to get to their own. It was a makeshift arrangement, but one appreciated by the adventurous spirit of youth, provoked to enthusiasm by the bewildering addition of so many unsuspected brothers and sisters into their joint lives.

“Haste comes of the Evil One:  
Leisure from God.”

CHINESE SAYING.

## CHAPTER VII

### MAGA

THE domestic staff at Belit Place did not view Miss Julia's departure for Scotland with the complacency of previous years.

Her personal maid and Jason, the butler, went with her, leaving the mansion in charge of Mrs. Scott. The orderly precision of their lives was disturbed by an unkind Fate—in the guise of the dead Count Kritzulesco—propelling into the circle, not only his young daughter—"an odd young lady if ever there was one — but nevertheless a lady, every inch of her" — but that young lady's nurse — "a sinister-looking person with the foreign name of Maga!"

"As you know, Mr. Jason, from your long acquaintance with me, I am not one to shirk responsibilities," said Mrs. Scott trenchantly, "but I place no reliance on that crafty-eyed Polish person. Just the sort to set the house afire."

"Not much risk of that with her living up on the top floor."

"May I draw your attention to the wide stairway placed for her convenience?"

"Not by her, Mrs. Scott. Fair's fair as you should know."

"Well," conceded the housekeeper, anxious to receive credit for magnanimity, even towards a foreigner—"such women should be managed by men.

The few times I have spoken to her, she looks down her

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nose at me, for all the world as though she thought I was a black-beetle.”

“Ignorance—just ignorance,” he conceded; don’t forget she doesn’t understand a word you say to her.”

“I’m not so sure about that. Maybe ’tis a blind to get her own way better.” Mrs. Scott resented the establishment on the top floor of the west wing of the house by its sullen occupant, who did her own housework and her own cooking. So far as the houseproud Mrs. Scott could observe, both were perfunctory.

The culinary operations, carried out on an oil-stove in the small back room, intrigued the imaginations of the housemaids. But not pleasurably. The pungent effluvium from the oil and edible accessories, could not rival good, honest English cooking odours, such as the servants at Belit Place associated with their terms of service. All attempts on Mrs. Scott’s part to penetrate into “the goings on” in the west wing “suite” of rooms were quietly—but firmly and decidedly foiled, by the watchful Maga.

Lack of fluency in the English language prevented Maga voicing her wishes or her intuitions, else had she settled for all time the need for the housekeeper’s supervision of the four rooms allocated to her use by Miss Julia. Gradually her wishes suggestively influenced Mrs. Scott, and Maga and the great hound were abandoned to the seclusion they sought. The

outward tenor of their lives ran quietly, yet, had Mrs. Scott's curiosity attained to information, her approval would have been withheld.

The Polish woman slept far into the morning, seldom rising to make her liberal libations of tea before midday. The afternoons were spent in needlework or simple domestic duties and in preparing the one ample meal she took each day.

When the dark of the evening stole over the land,

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she went forth, accompanied by the hound, and spent the hours of the night in walking for miles over the fields or through the lanes beyond Highgate, beyond St. Albans, or through the dark woods at Hatfield, until the fight of the coming dawn from the east warned her she must return.

Bitterly she resented the ordering of her life by her dead master, since it led her to this England where every sound, every sight angered with its suggestion of smug respectability.

With the sick longing of a countrywoman, too old to bear the uprooting of habits and customs, inbred for centuries in the great forests and wide plains of her Polish land, the nostalgia of despair seized her.

When the September moon rose into the sky above Hampstead, high and majestic in its silver splendour, her resisting spirit broke. Crouching beneath a great thorn bush, in a lonely part of the heath, she screamed her agony to the dark blue vault above.

An eerie cry—ringing far beyond where she lay, disturbing the sleeping dwellers in the farms by its



unusual discordance.

“Suree—be a dawg baying at the moon,” said one.

“Sounds like a death-cry from some poor passing soul,” whispered another.

“Onlucky, I calls et,” murmured a sleepy old woman, burying her head under the bedclothes. “In the morning us’ll hear some poor wight has passed along.”

A safe prophecy, though she who made it knew no world beyond the few miles of Hampstead. As Maga squatted beneath the protecting thorn bush, eyes fixed on the rotting tree mould, dank to the nostrils in the night air, her bitter thoughts flew back to that September night when first she held within her willing arms, her adored master’s baby daughter. That secret joy no one could snatch away. It was all hers.

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Unknown to the sleeping household within the Castle, she had crept down the stone stairs—across the courtyard, into the forest—on and on—between the tall trees to the secret meeting place beneath the rocks.

For Maga, like her mother before her, was steeped to the engulfing of her soul, in the unholy superstitions of the Polish peasants, the undercurrent of whose lives were more real than the outward tenets of the Roman Catholic Church they supposedly professed.

How much, or how little, of the truth the Polish priests knew—or divined—is difficult to say. That they knew something is certain, but to uproot or destroy the ingrained satanic beliefs of thousands of years is beyond the powers of man. The emasculated broken figure of the bleeding Christ, touched neither

indignation nor aroused sympathy. The pallid figure of His Lady Mother was, to these untutored minds, the perpetual reminder of a young girl's frailty. The Cross, the portrayed sepulchre—the mundane confessional box—the Holy water stoup—all the priestly insignia of the Church's watchful power, were stamped with the threat of retribution—portentous and affrighting.

Whereas in the forest, before the carefully concealed stone sacrificial posts, secluded from the stealthy interference of the priests, or the rough merriment of the police, a fearful excitation of the senses might be sought and ravenously enjoyed.

From the depths of the soul it arose! Destructively cruel! A flaming torch of psychic, bestial ecstacy, to light the mysteries of the forbidden road.

To those midnight orgies the votaries crept as silently as the bats and owls circled round the night-hushed houses. From the four comers of definite space they came—enticed by the heated shame of their own evil joys.

The vaster the company, the larger the circle—

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the magic circle of the coiled serpent—the more certain the results. Each votary gave a creative atom from his guilty soul. Gave ebulliently—mewing and mouthing—tasting the gall and wormwood of satanic illusion.

To the making of the Nebulous Form, cravenly venerated as “The Old One,” went the smoke of a bloody sacrifice, bubbling up from the dayspring of perversion. His proximity, more perceptive to the

senses than the sight, seldom denied itself to his worshippers if the proscribed ceremonies were carried out.

On that September night, seventeen years ago, she had taken her nursling to the secret gathering, clasped closely—exultantly—to her warm bosom. Ye gods! what an offering to the Lords of the Darkness of the Forbidden Land.

A firstling! Without blemish! No stigma of the Cross to nullify the offering!

On her other arm she carried a basket containing an unwilling prisoner—a lusty black cock, destined for uses to which he was not hatched.

No words were needed to unfold her intuitions to her fellows in the circle. The sleeping babe—the indignant cock. The proximity of each to the other revealed what was afoot. Placing the child on the ground, she opened the lid of the basket. Then she drew out the fluttering, protesting bird, and accepting a long, steel knife from a man who suddenly placed himself by the stone post, she forced the struggling cock on to the stone pediment and skilfully cut his throat. The blood dropped into a shallow hollow on the top of the post—with a raucous cry she held the fluttering bird aloft——

“All hail!” she cried.

Dropping the dying cock, she bent and lifted the sleeping babe to the height of the stone just as she

again cried,” All hail!” she smeared her bloody fingers across the infant’s forehead in three short lines.

The hitherto silent participants in the act of dedication added their supplications, "Accept! Accept!" Their voices rose in various discordant tones through the forest trees as their kneeling bodies swayed in unison. Only the woman remained upright, holding the sleeping child recumbent on the stone.

Was it delusion, or was it the expiring bodily heat from the slaughtered bird, or was it the faint luminosity of a wandering moonbeam creeping between the trunks of the pines?

Something other than these—a delusive shadow, formless yet perceptible. It straightened. Maga shrieked affrightedly. The holder of the knife seized the sleeping child—he knew it would not waken from its drugged sleep—holding it aloft as the woman fell in an ecstasy of epilepsy at the foot of the post.

\* \* \* \* \*

With the ferocity of a tainted mind, made the more fearful by the enjoyment of her forbidden knowledge, Maga recalled those pregnant moments, when in the depths of the forest, surrounded by the ghoulish members of that secret cult, she had baptized to the service of her God, her master's helpless babe.

To what end? Was it for glory? Was it for gain? No. It was to gratify a fiendish lust for secret power — overwhelming in intensity—wholly evil.

This same temptation has stalked the earth since the first recorded seance in the Garden of Eden between Eve, the mother of men, and Satan, the prince of the world. A simple story with a frightful meaning, and to-

day in Christian, as in so-called heathen lands, this unnatural, this satanic traffic still goes on. Men know it. Women know it. The pith of the accursed

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thing remains, only its manifestations change, and veer, and rearrange themselves according to the credulity, the ignorance or the intelligence of those dabblers in the occult.

It would seem that Evil is more interesting than Good. Men turn more easily to the left than to the right. Yet in the end the Apples of Satan turn to ashes in the mouth.

Over the scent-borne air of Hampstead the September moon sailed on. The serene beauty of the night foretold no tragedies—revealed no secret griefs harbouring their terrors in the hearts of the sleepers in the night.

The crouching woman stirred. Before the morning sun would gild the sky she must away back to the hated silence of that fearsome house, her prison; it might even be her grave. Yes, it would be that!

The Old One permitted his servant so much foreknowledge. She laughed! Was he to be praised for that? She muttered to herself.

“A hard taskmaster even to those who serve him well.” And the answer forced itself into her morbid understanding.

“Yet I have given you joy, ungrateful one.”

“Yes, master,” she answered.

Going slowly back she stumbled; a pressure from an unseen source forced her down. She grovelled on

the ground.

“Forgive, forgive.” A sharp flint cut its point into her cheek. Seeing the spot of blood on her groping finger, she whispered:

“All hail! to thee I sacrifice!”

The dawn broke—long shafts of rosy hue spread over the heavens, mingling with some fleecy clouds floating across the eastern sky. Nearing the high ivy-drest wall, through whose narrow postern door was

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her way, the Polish woman paused. Observingly her glance swept over the heath, still half obscured by the shadows of the trees. In crooked lines across her face stole the recollection of success. Again she cast her thoughts back to another September night, when she and they—the secret theys— set the final seal on the dedication of her fosterling to the forbidden god. She had carried the child through the balmy air securely swathed in a woollen shawl to the secret meeting-place in the forest. The scene was staged; the ceremonies begun.

A wide circle of indefinite figures squatting on their heels surrounded the stone post. In the centre of the circle, but not touching the post, stood the knife-holder. As the woman drew near, he bent and made a slashing movement at something lying by his feet. A tiny light—the minute flame from a rush-light— flickered on the ground. Unrolling her burden, Maga placed the sleeping, naked child upon the greensward, pointing to the wavering point of light. Rapidly she spoke:

“See, heart’s desire, run there and dip thy fingers in the soup.”

For an instant the little maid lingered, looking out of sleep-laden eyes up into the familiar face of her foster-mother—then, with a little chuckling laugh she obeyed; she had been carefully—exultantly—trained to carry out this strange behest.

Too young to question or understand, the little, darting figure reached the light; the knife-bearer bent down, and seizing her soft arm, guided her baby hand to dabble in the disembowelled body of a cock, to stain her fingers in the bubbling blood.

Smiling in the ecstasy of his hellish work, he put his hand on her head pressing her gently to her knees; a whispered injunction to repeat after him the

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devotional cry of the circle wrung from her baby lips some sound which passed for his intention.

He let her go.

“Run, little one, run,” he said gloatingly.

Back over the now cold grass she tripped, a tiny, naked figure, heading for “Nannie” and her warm shawl!

\* \* \* \* \*

That was sixteen years ago! The Polish woman leaned against the ivy-covered wall, memories sweet, yet horrible, flowed over her. Only to go back—just that—away from this smug English land to the great forests and their dark stillnesses; to the sweet smell of the pines! Groaning, she fell against the door, pressing

her black-draped head between her hands to ease the throbbing of her temples.

The boon of tears was denied her, for only angels—or saints—may weep.



“Go, stalk the red deer o’er the heather,  
Ride, follow the fox if you can I  
But, for pleasure and profit together.  
Allow me the hunting of Man—  
The chase of the Human, the search for the Soul  
To its ruin—the hunting of Man.”

KIPLING.

## CHAPTER VIII

### LYCANTHIA'S HEADACHES

MISS JULIA and Lycanthia returned to Belit Place the first week in October. The visit to Scotland had been pleasant for both. Miss Julia enjoyed her annual meeting with friends who, for various reasons, could not come south; and presenting Lycanthia to her cousins—often in the second or third degree—added a wholesome interest to the usual routine.

The cousins were no less anxious to meet and appraise the Polish relation, whose romantic parentage they discussed with the zest of youthful exuberance. Not before her, delicacy restrained them when she first came among them, but Lycanthia, as much interested as they were in the love affair of her father, broke the icy reserve of good manners by asking bluntly:

“Well, what do you think of me?”

The opportune moment arrived when eight or ten of “the cousins” were in the library refreshing themselves after a long tramp with the guns.

Lycanthia, accustomed to living in the open air the greater part of each year—to riding all day—or driving in her brisquar, four horses abreast—or spending hours tracking game in her father's forests, had nothing to learn from her cousins; on the contrary, her business methods of going out with the guns raised her high in the estimation of the men and ruffled the self-esteem of the women.

Unconcernedly she asked her question—shrewdly

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estimating the semi-hostile attitude of her own sex. To emphasise her detachment from their opinions she lighted one of her own cigars and, back against a bookcase, looked the group over.

“Well?” she queried.

“You odd girl,” exclaimed Mona Carruthers. “What a question to ask. How can we answer it?”

“You are all thinking it.”

“Thinking what?”

“How un-English I am.”

“We are all Scots here,” murmured another shy cousin.

“Is there any difference?”

“Rather. We should think so.” From the men came a growl, affirmative or negative was not explained.

“To me it is all the same. But if there is a difference—well—that will add to my oddity. On my father’s side I am Polish, Austrian, Russian and some German; on Pauline’s side I am English and Scottish. If you could shake me up in a bottle I wonder if I should mix?”

“You are odd, you know, just to think of such a mixing.”

Lycanthia gravely looked at the glowing end of her cigar.

“No, I often think of that. Being here among you all has made me think more.”

“I bet you’re jolly nice when we get to know you,” gallantly interrupted one of the older men. He was a

cousin four times removed, and, having made the biggest bag that day, was indisposed to let disagreeable incidents spoil his pleasant reflections.

“Can any girl made up of so many different bits ever get known by anyone?”

“Question too deep for me. I’m all Scottish—just

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plain Scottish—you are the first foreign girl I’ve talked to.”

An amused smile widened Lycanthia’s mouth.

“How little you must know then.”

This observation, quietly made, evoked no ungracious retort from her listeners. They all watched her—a tall, slight girl, long-legged, flat-bosomed, with remarkable long hands, the nails prominent and unusually thick. She radiated strength as she stood, both feet firmly set on the carpet; young in years she might be, indeed was, but not in the secret forces of her personality which set her apart from them.

Some instinct—was it protective or merely cautious—the famous Scottish caution of the shrewd—which divided Lycanthia from her northern relations?

Once they realized she had noticed their tacit avoidance of any genuine intimacy, they carefully refrained from showing it. But they knew she was not deceived. In her odd way she looked through them; their pretences could not disguise the reality, but she was not affronted; she told herself it was the mixed strain of races which prevented a clear understanding.

On the whole the visit was a success. Miss Julia intended it should be; her relations supported her

wishes as is generally the way when an orphaned young girl is launched into the social whirlpool of her world.

Back at Belit Place, Miss Julia made arrangements for Lycanthia to join the various hunts in the neighbourhood. Herself a noted horsewoman in her youth, and a keen follower to hounds, she had continued her subscriptions to the Old Berkshire Foxhounds, the Puckeridge and Mr. Gerard Leigh's Hounds, so all that remained for her to do was to rearrange her stables.

Smith received Miss Julia's instructions with the dignity he felt suitable to the occasion, but he warned

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her: "You will need to buy a good few horses, miss, if you mean to go riding. About 'ow many days a week will you mount?"

"Well, not too many at first. I had not intended riding again, but with my niece to chaperon it will be different."

"In buying for Miss Lycanthia we'll need to look for blood and action. She do ride her 'osses hard. A chicken-hearted one'd have his spirit broke in no time." Smith rubbed a finger meditatively over his stubbly chin— "And it won't be cheap. 'Tis a bit late to get a stud together; either the 'osses'll be green—out of condition—or else we'll have to pay through the nose for other men's nursing."

"She must ride, Smith. Miss Lycanthia is accustomed to an open-air life."

“Oh, aye, I’m saying naught agin that. But ’tis my dooty to point out what the cost is to be.”

“If I ride I must have four horses. The three in the stables are Miss Lycanthia’s, and she’ll require a fourth. Then the groom can’t do with less than two.”

“True for you, miss. That means seven new horses and two more grooms; can’t be done for less.”

Miss Julia smiled.

“Do not be lugubrious over it, Smith. Rather be glad, all this coming and going makes life in the house.”

“Oh, I’ve nothing agin life—only the expenses of it.”

“I will write to his lordship to-night, to ask if he is likely to be up in town, but failing him, Smith, I will send you to Tattersails to see what you can find there.”

The filling of the Belit Place stables was speedily attained. Judgment and money can generally obtain what is required, and Miss Julia provided both in making her selection of hunters.

For a couple of weeks the stables were the centre of congenial excitement and The Irishman’s Castle reaped the benefit of the thirsty additions to the stable staff—the tavern being the nearest convivial centre to Belit Place. The domestic vagaries of the landlord providing risible comments among the bar frequenters, which spread to the surrounding stables and cottages.

“A bit of meaty gossip,” averred the carriers of it. “Just fancy! Five or six kids shoved in among the

others. Two nice full old railway carriages stalled in the back yard—a brave show!”

In due course the news reached Miss Julia, discreetly revealed by Mrs. Scott.

“Quite disgraceful,” was the lady’s remark. “Do not mention it before Miss Lycanthia.”

“I think the young lady heard of it from the Polish person.”

“But how did she learn of it? Her knowledge of English is so restricted she cannot talk to strangers.”

“She was taking the dog for a walk, and as she passed the inn yard, all the children rushed out to look at Dlugoss—a dirty ragged lot they were too— and Maga was afraid they would annoy that great dog. She mentioned it to me when she returned.”

Miss Julia considered the position.

“I suppose,” she said slowly, “Maga would mention it to Miss Lycanthia. Did you tell Maga about——” she hesitated, “the children?”

“I did, Miss Julia.” The housekeeper’s voice was firm. “You know how loose foreigners’ ideas are on those matters and I did not wish her to think such conduct was usual—on the part of married men—in England.”

Miss Julia was conscious her knowledge in this particular direction was limited—nor did she resent

it. Yet, dimly, in the virtuous recesses of her mind certain suspicions lurked that even Englishmen could not truthfully be absolved of divergence from the path of conjugal rectitude. But ladies of her condition and

training were expected to modestly cast down their eyes—look the other way—in fact, do anything than reveal a knowledge of the *risqué* ways of life.

Mrs. Scott, from the fastness of her matrimonial widowhood, was permitted a more generous latitude. It was pleasing to feel her superiority in knowledge over her revered mistress: it was an occasion when pride could be allowed to sway an otherwise humble mental attitude before Miss Julia.

“Perhaps Miss Lycanthia will not really understand the meaning of that large family.”

Mrs. Scott’s face assumed an expression of restrained credulity, but privately she thought Miss Julia’s niece was far more well-informed on facts of nature than her innocent aunt. Mrs. Scott thought of Miss Julia’s lack of worldly knowledge as “innocence”—respect for her amiable mistress prevented her admitting that “innocence” to be “ignorance.”

All she said was—

“We will hope so.”

Miss Julia dismissed the unsavoury subject as altogether beneath her notice. The shocking domestic arrangements of the Irishman’s Castle were not her concern, though as a Christian she deplored them; the tavern took on a definite halo of disrespectability—she wished she could, justly, forbid any person in her employ to frequent its dissolute portals.

She withdrew her mind from lingering on the impossible.

“Will you find Miss Lycanthia and send her to me?” she asked the housekeeper. But the young



lady was not to be found, neither in the library nor her bedroom. Mrs. Scott mounted to the west wing to ask Maga if she knew where her young lady was.

When Mrs. Scott opened the door at the top of the stairs which shut off the four rooms, Maga glided rapidly forward—so noiselessly, Mrs. Scott glanced at her feet—they were shoeless.

“Hush,” she breathed, one finger pressed to her lips. “Miss Lycanthia sleep——” Then encircling her forehead with both hands, “bad ’ead—vaire bad.”

“Headache?” inquired the housekeeper.

Maga shook her head violently.

“Oh! so bad—sleep now”

Her attitude expressed such inflexible determination to keep Mrs Scott outside the partly-opened door, her object in secluding her young mistress from disturbance was achieved.

Descending to the morning-room, Mrs. Scott delivered her report.

Miss Julia listened, then remarked—

“Why will she go up there to sleep? Why cannot she remain in her own room?”

“It’s understandable, miss. Poor young lady, she don’t seem to have had much of a mother’s care—only Maga to look after her.”

An innate sense of justice obliged Miss Julia to agree. The reflection was saddening, Lycanthia had not had a fair chance in that outlandish land which was her father’s country—at least according to Miss Julia’s outlook on life.

“You may be right, Scott,” she said, “yet her close connection with her old nurse causes me serious uneasiness.”

Mrs. Scott cleared her throat nervously.

“There is another reason, miss, for Miss Lycanthia being so—well, so close with Maga. Maybe you have

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heard it yourself. Miss Lycanthia was my informant. In some——” she cleared her throat again, “not very desirable way Maga is related to our young lady, and being in a new country makes that tie even stronger.”

Miss Julia blushed.

“I believe you were rightly informed, but we will not mention it again.”

“Of course, miss, I feel the same about it, but Miss Lycanthia is rather free in speech, and so——” Mrs. Scott’s voice faded away into a whisper. Miss Julia bowed her head.

“That will do, Scott.”

These confidences were the outcome of an unacknowledged affection between Miss Julia and her housekeeper, begun when the lady was a shy, reserved girl of ten and Mrs. Scott her personal maid, destined to wed the butler and to become a widow within five years.

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That evening Miss Julia dined alone but had her coffee served in the morning-room as she had several letters to write.

A late October moon came up over the tall elms in the garden, sending a silver shaft of light across the waters of the lake at the end of the lawn. It was a scene Miss Julia particularly liked, and when the moon was full, the shutters before the French windows were not closed until the garden was once more in darkness.

Miss Julia wrote two letters, but paused over the wording of the third, meditatively she bit the end of the long quill pen; without conscious volition she raised her eyes from the newly-begun page to gaze for one unseeing moment into an oval-shaped, gilt and crimson laquered mirror, placed rather low upon

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the wall. Reflected in it was the unshuttered French window, a lanky, grey, dog-like-looking animal framed in the embrasure outside.

Miss Julia rose to her feet. She was a lover of dogs, but the one pressing its pointed snout against the glass was of a breed unknown. She turned, advancing to the window; the dog withdrew, fading into the blackness of the terrace. For a moment Miss Julia thought of opening the window, but prudence restrained her. The animal appeared quiet, but in Miss Julia's day, hydrophobia was rife in England and strange dogs were viewed askance.

She rang the bell.

"Jason," she said when the butler appeared, "a large, grey dog is on the terrace—a strange dog, quite as big as Miss Lycanthia's; put in the shutters and in the morning let the gardeners know; the door from the drive must have been left open."

A simple order, unreflectingly received and duly carried out, without discovering the identity of the intruder.

Miss Julia went slowly up to her bedroom. Something in the attitude of the strange dog puzzled her. It should have looked fierce with such a powerful frame, but her impression of it had been a weary animal seeking rest.

“Poor brute,” she said.

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Lycanthia’s indisposition confined her to bed until the following afternoon. Miss Julia went several times to inquire how she was, but until after four o’clock met with the somewhat sullen answer—

“Miss Lycanthia, she sleeps.”

When finally, Miss Julia succeeded in breaking

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down the impalpable, yet effective barrier erected by Maga, Lycanthia had returned to her room.

The fading daylight hid much from Miss Julia’s anxious scrutiny, yet Lycanthia’s extreme exhaustion was apparent. She lay flat on her back, both arms limply lying outside the bedclothes, her long, fair hair in two plaits, brushed smoothly away from her face, accentuating its peaky outline. Her eyes sunk into their sockets, surrounded by blue-black smudges, startled her aunt by their deadened expression. She looked very young and almost pathetic in her extreme fatigue.

“My dear child,” exclaimed Miss Julia, “you look ill! What is the matter?”

“Just one of my headaches, Auntie.”

“One of your headaches? You never had them in Scotland! You talk as though you were accustomed to them.”

“So I am, Auntie, ever since I was a little girl.”

“But can nothing be done? Surely there must be some precautions you could take to avoid such violent reaction.”

Miss Julia’s voice expressed the concern she felt: she was shocked at the condition of extreme weakness of her niece’s voice, her dulled eyes, her ashen-hued face. She stood by the bed, gazing with consternation on the wreck of the erstwhile robust young girl.

Unobserved, until she was by her side, Maga had noiselessly come into the room. Pausing by Miss Julia, she whispered—

“It will pass.” Tapping her forehead—“Pain ‘ere. Miss Lycanthia sleep now—better to-morrow.”

“I suppose,” observed Miss Julia dubiously, “Maga should know you and the meaning of these headaches. If they continue, my dear, Sir Dickson Power must see you; perhaps he can advise a course of treatment.”

“Perhaps,” assented Lycanthia, “but do not disturb yourself too much, by lunch time to-morrow I shall be better.”

After the door, politely held by Maga, closed behind Miss Julia, the Polish woman returned to the bedside. Passionately she addressed her young mistress, kneeling beside the bed and tenderly stroking

her relaxed hand. Lycanthia watched her with affection, whispering her reply:

“Be still and let be. Miss Julia thinks there is a medicine for every ill. She is kind; she means well.”

“Yet she will never understand. Who is she that she should? What do these English know of us? our customs, our beliefs?”

“Would they think well of them if they did?”

“What matters that? Our secrets are our own.” She moved her head, glancing obliquely into a darkened corner of the room. “Have I not taught you all I know, my beloved little one? What joy have you known in your short life save what I have given?”

The tension of her entreaty impinged disturbingly upon the weary girl.

“Let me sleep now; to-morrow I shall be revived. Sing me to sleep.”

The request died away almost before the wish took form. Maga smiled as she pressed nearer to the relaxed figure, inclined towards her; steadily she passed her hand to and fro over Lycanthia’s eyes and brow. The little song she sang in Polish can be translated:

“Sleep with my arms around you  
Close to my mother-breast,  
Where oft your red lips have fastened,  
Your life-quell in dreaming prest.

Heart's ease you will carry with you  
Wherever the moon's rays rest.  
Heart-dearest be ever tranquil  
As close in my heart you rest."

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Lycanthia joined her aunt at luncheon the next day. Beyond the pallor of her face and dark rings round her deep-set eyes she appeared to be in her usual collected spirits—neither depressed not excited. The afternoon was spent in visiting the stables and inspecting the horses, of whom there were now a goodly number.

"We will hunt with the Berkshire on Friday," said Miss Julia. "I will ride the big black, I like his paces; Miss Lycanthia will select her own. And by the way, Smith, if the meet is near Abingdon, send over the horses on Thursday night."

"'Tis like old days, Miss Julia, to see so much stirring in the stables," replied the gratified Smith. "Our young lady is brightening things up a bit."

“Wherever God erects a house of prayer  
The Devil always builds a chapel there;  
And ‘twill be found, upon examination,  
The latter has the largest congregation.”

D. DEFOE.



## CHAPTER IX

### DAVID SCRY MGEOUR

MISS JULIA and Lycanthia hunted regularly up to Christmas. The elder lady regaining her skill, and with it her love of riding. She felt a little ashamed at shedding ten years of deliberately assumed age, of entering once more into the creative stream of life, abandoned by her as suitable only for “the young.”

Lycanthia was reckless once seated in the saddle, or more correctly, astride her horse, for she never had ridden as her aunt rode.

“My father said to ride astride in breeches is safer than in a long skirt,” she told her aunt, “and I agree.”

She looked strikingly virile when mounted—almost handsome—yet of the two the elder lady attracted the more admiration.

Lycanthia showed herself indifferent to the opinions of men or women. A girl, more oblivious to the natural allurements of sex never hunted with the Berkshire. She was so coldly indifferent as to attract comment. Very sure of herself, almost hostile towards the least suggestion of sentiment, she nevertheless proved her capacity for handling intelligently each situation, or discussing each subject of conversation to which her attention was drawn.

Seventeen years in age, but unnumbered aeons in a facile understanding of actual facts, whose real significance was concealed from usual knowledge.

Her young hardness puzzled her aunt, at heart a

very loving woman whose paternal training had imposed a restraint on every natural talent, until a measure of supineness slowly encompassed her emotions and she abandoned her personal inclinations to his. But during his lifetime his imposition on her patience and her intelligence had not made her unhappy. A clever man—amusing and, above all, dominating—he filled her life with interests.

After his death she felt adrift, yet at times conscious of a suppressed spring of life; a something striving for expression. Her whole training was against her. Forty-five years of age was definitely “old” for a woman. She resigned herself to be and to remain “an old maid.” The abundance of her hair alone prevented her donning lace caps such as married ladies, of middle age, wore in the seventies, but she wavered sometimes against her own inclinations, fearing to render herself ridiculous.

Lycanthia, unintentionally, but with the directness of tactless youth, restored to her questioning indecision a measure of quiet content.

“How young you look, auntie, when mounted! Why will you wear dresses and bonnets suitable for elderly ladies?”

“I am no longer young and it is not becoming for anyone of my age to ape youth.”

Lycanthia laughed.

“You cannot ‘ape ’ what you already are.”

“Your remarks sound like flattery.”

“No, they are the truth. My father always said you walked like a girl and thought like a girl. He wondered when you would grow up.”

“Lycanthia,” Miss Julia’s voice assumed the tone of the monitress, “how many times have I asked you not to

repeat your father's confidences?"

"Oh I" retorted her niece lightly, "he only spoke

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his mind when wine loosened his tongue. It was then he remembered you."

Miss Julia was undecided whether disgust or pity was due to the man, whose vocal memories of her found readiest expression when befuddled with wine. She forbore to express this sentiment, as much as a strong protective instinct as out of consideration for Count Kritzulesco's daughter.

She changed the subject.

"If you consider bonnets too matronly to be worn by ladies of my age, what will you do if her Majesty honours us with an invitation to a garden-party at the Palace next year, after you have been presented?"

Lycanthia looked startled.

"What do you mean, auntie?"

"Why, every young lady who goes to the Palace must wear a bonnet; in fact, once you are presented at a drawing-room you must wear a bonnet when you go to London."

"Is that the custom?"

"It is."

"Need I be presented?"

"I should be failing in my duty to you if that important occasion was omitted."

Lycanthia sighed.

"I would not mind so much if I could go with you."

"No unmarried lady may make a presentation. But I am accompanying you when cousin Constance does so."

"Another 'custom,' I suppose. My father said the English were great sticklers for 'custom.' In Poland we

are not so fond of ‘customs ’ which we do not like.”

“But we are not in Poland,” Miss Julia reminded her gently.

Her niece’s face darkened.

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“I know, and often I wonder if I shall become used to these English customs.”

“Some rules there must be in every country, and, Lycanthia, in time I hope you will come to like, even love, your mother’s country.”

The girl shook her head.

“No, auntie,” she answered gravely, “I do not think so. I feel stifled—smothered. All the days I must hold myself in. Always I find myself saying, ‘Be still.’ There may come a day when that will be no longer possible—when I must away.”

Miss Julia was practical.

“But where could you go, Lycanthia, if you left me? You cannot live alone, your father’s relations are as strangers.”

“All that I know. I think my father did it purposely.”

“Did what?”

“Prevented me knowing his relations. My grandmother had many, some of them I knew, of others Maga told me—yet my father kept me to himself.”

A hope flitted across Miss Juba’s mind.

“Probably he cared for you very much.”

“No, he never did! If he talked to me it was to see if I had inherited your tricks of speech. When he looked at me it was you he sought in my expression.”

“Either all this is your imagination or else your father had most unworthily allowed himself to become obsessed by a figment of his imagination.”

This was the most severe comment Miss Julia permitted herself to make against her brother-in-law.

“That I do not understand; he always seemed serious when he talked to me.” She hesitated, then looked sideways at her aunt. “Poor father, I was sorry for him.”

Miss Julia drew herself up.

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“There is another aspect to that,” she said haughtily.

“I know, I know, auntie, now I know you. It was nobody’s fault—only my father’s misfortune.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Julia began to fear the confidences she hoped to establish with her young niece would not advance beyond the profitless discussion of Count Kritzulesco’s thwarted passion for herself. Yet she showed so much shrewd observation in the daily events of their joint lives, her reticence on deeper matters was bewildering. Miss Julia sensed a barrier between them, deliberately raised and jealously guarded. She asked herself if Lycanthia’s affections were given to her Polish nurse. If that was so it was at least understandable, but in Miss Julia’s opinion not desirable.

These reflections gradually grouped themselves into a background for the domestic and social happenings of their lives. A letter received at the beginning of the second week in December from a Scottish cousin provided an agreeable interlude.

Cairn Gower,  
Argyllshire.

Dearest Julia,

*Will you act the part of a good Christian and have David with you for Christmas? His tutor at Eton has written to say David has slight pneumonia of one lung and the doctor thinks it inadvisable for him to come home in the depth of winter. I cannot come south. Douglas declines to be left in charge of the girls as Fraulein is leaving for good and the new governess does not arrive until February.*

*If you can, and will, have David, will you send me a telegram and will you write direct to him at Eton?*

*How is poor Pauline's girl getting on? I am so*

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*sorry I did not see her when she was in Scotland, but I have heard a lot about her.*

*Your affectionate cousin,  
Janet Scrymgeour.*

This letter brought with it a welcome solution of Miss Julia's emotional difficulties. David Scrymgeour was a quiet boy of seventeen, due to leave Eton his next term when he was going on to Oxford. Lycanthia would find in him not only racial affinity, but a sensible mentality which might draw her out—even proving a welcome antidote to Maga's uncultured ignorance.

When Mrs. Scrymgeour's letter was shown to Lycanthia she made no comment. A boy of seventeen created no impression on her horizon: he would come, he

would go. She suspected her aunt would expect her to take an interest in her semi-invalid cousin. This probability was not pleasing.

When the time arrived for David to leave Eton, Miss Julia sent her brougham and the greys to bring him to Hampstead. To her naturally anxious observation, he looked delicate as he came in at the hall door: she was awaiting him in the vestibule.

“Well, David, you are very welcome. What report has the doctor sent with you?”

“Lung clear, but may take a few weeks to heal. But I say! Cousin Julia, how ripping of you to let me come to Belit Place.” Cordially he gripped her hand in greeting. He was a tall boy, narrow-chested, with a mop of untidy, black hair, giving character to his pallid skin and deeply-set, grey eyes. Ungainly, with large feet and hands, the latter covered with chilblains, he was not prepossessing; nevertheless, Miss Julia liked him; he gave an impression of fundamental honesty.

As an invalid he was given a south bedroom, complete

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with the luxury of a fire; the room was between Miss Julia's and the one occasionally occupied by Lycanthia,

The cousins met at tea-time, David more curious than she. His mother had written an account of Lycanthia's romantic parentage, and while he was not particularly interested in it, still Poland and its troubled history added a suggestion of mystery.

Lycanthia's physical aloofness wreathed in swirling spirals of cigar smoke, completed his subjugation. He, mentally, assigned to her an undue importance in his cousin's household, for never had a young lady ventured

to desire to smoke, much less do so, at Belit Place, or indeed at any house to which he had admittance.

He excused her singularity because of her father's race. He had heard Russian ladies smoked and Russia was next door to Poland.

Lycanthia treated him as an unfledged exponent of an English public-school education with a claim on her attention through his cousin-ship to her dead mother and living aunt. How many degrees removed from herself and their common ancestor she neither knew nor cared. She supposed once linked to Scotland unlimited cousinship followed; she visualized that cousinship as clothed in the kilt finished off by brawny, naked knees treasuring conspicuous harvests of hairs.

David's freedom from his national dress she ascribed to his English school's custom—or even prejudice.

Such were the impressions the young cousins made on each other, but unexpressed in vocal terms. Miss Julia had no share in them, her wider range of interests, commencing before their entry into the world, placed her above and beyond them. Their individual knowledge of themselves—hearsay recitals of events, social, political or domestically mundane—were still unformed. Unconscious of their ignorance, conscious of their apartness from her, they regarded her as an “old

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maid,” kindly, even amusing, but definitely “ancient.” Good breeding rather than good feeling decided their acceptance of her prejudices so long as she was their hostess.

Perhaps some echo of these mental vibrations—in later days to be termed “wireless”—induced her to say:



“Where is Dlugoss? You should introduce David to him.”

Over the inspection of the formidable-looking hound the cousins made a definite advance in friendliness.

“I am keen on dogs,” said David, “but I have never seen one like this.”

Dlugoss’s doggish ancestry was carefully given by his mistress, observingly received by David, to whom the intricacies of pedigrees were no difficulty.

“Doesn’t the strain of wolf blood make him a bit uncertain?” he asked.

“It has never shown in him. When Stephan gave him to me he said: ‘He is safe, he drinks his water like a dog, but his litter sister laps her like a wolf, so her I shall kill.’”

“Curious, but if the fellow is right, jolly interesting.”

“Stephan is Maga’s nephew; he knows dogs.”

“Wolves, too, judging by his remark. I say, Lycanthia, have you hunted wolves in Poland?”

For a moment she hesitated, then said:

“Not with Dlugoss.”

“Why not with him? He is three parts dog, he can’t have much affinity with those savage brutes.” “Stephan said better not; he was never taken to the hunts. We had other hounds kept specially for that. My father left the kennels to Stephan’s care.”

“Oh! well, there are no wolves in England, except in confinement; I believe my Uncle Rob has a few in

Skye—nasty, mangy-looking beasts, my father says—they were brought from Brittany as cubs.”

“Does he hunt them?”

“Lor’ no. It wouldn’t be allowed in England or Scotland.”

“But you hunt the fox.”

“Of course we do; but a fox only steals poultry, he’s a harmless sort of fellow. Wolves devour people.”

“Certainly in Poland hunting is more dangerous than in England.” Lycanthia was thoughtful. “My father was gored by a wild boar.”

“By gad! “Did you see it?”

“Yes, but one of our huntsmen got to him first and stuck the boar; he was dead when I got back to father. At first we did not think the wound was serious, but it turned poisonous and a few months later my father died.”

“Bad luck for you.”

“Yes,” her reply was slow, “it brought me to England.”

He looked at her quickly—the gist of her remark suggested a misfortune intensified by her personal loss.

“Don’t you like it here?”

“Not really. Cousin Julia is kind—oh! so kind— but I do not find myself in accord with the life. I am stifled— shut in—it is all too comfortable, too sure.” Her voice vibrated with a note of pain.

He looked more closely at her, sympathy giving a slight measure of understanding.

“What do you find to do?”

Her face brightened.

“We ride; Cousin Julia has been so generous, she has filled her stables. We ride and hunt together.”

“The doctor at Eton said I may ride in fine weather, so I vote we ride together and take the dog. He looks as though he could follow most horses.”

“He comes when I ride over the heath, but not when we hunt.”

“Then I’ll speak to Cousin Julia and later get Smith to show me the stables. He’s a good judge of a horse so between them Cousin Julia should have horses worth seeing.”

The next morning Lycanthia and David went riding soon after breakfast, Dlugoss going with them. He bounded on in front as they went quietly after leaving the house. When the dog was before The Irishman’s Castle a ragged mob of children rushed out of the inn stable-yard throwing stones and pieces of dirt.

Lycanthia cantered to the rescue of her dog, but the little ragamuffins were so intent on attacking Dlugoss they did not see her until she rode among them, then they drew back, not abashed but awaiting a favourable moment to continue the attack.

Angrily David rode up to the tavern door; leaning forward he tapped at it with the end of his whip.

“Hey, Mr. Landlord,” he shouted. Perceiving he meant business the children retreated into the yard, then scattered and rushed into hiding.

Nat Cockspur hastily answered the summons. The horseman was a stranger but not the horse. His inn was at the corner of the lane which served the stable-yard at Belit Place and much of his regular custom came from the grooms and stable-boys.

“Yes, yes, sir,” he answered, “what is your wish?”

“That you stop those children throwing stones at our dog. A whole crowd of them—they have gone into the yard.”

“Sir, I am truly sorry; this shall have my immediate attention.”

“See that it does. By the way, Mr. Landlord, whose are they?”

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“The children, sir?” He paused, not quite certain to whom he was speaking.

Lycanthia brought her horse up to the door.

“I come from Belit Place,” she said, “and my aunt will be very angry when I tell her how those children stoned my dog.”

Nat Cockspur realized the gravity of his unruly children’s behaviour. Certainly Miss Mortimer-Beltane was not a lady to offend; moreover, she was widely known in the district as a lover of animals besides a generous giver to all charities.

“Please, miss, accept my humble apologies.” His tone was craven, partly through fear of consequences, but also because he stood in awe of the great hound whose intelligence might prompt him to reprisals—if opportunity offered. He judged rightly. He advanced towards Lycanthia’s horse; Dlugoss growled, a deep, full note of menace. Lycanthia spoke to him; he looked up into her face. She turned to the landlord.

“I hope,” she said firmly, “you will beat those children, they deserve it, to stone a dog. Look at his ear! Tom and bleeding!”

Nat Cockspur did look—from a distance.

“I beg you to accept my humble apologies,” he repeated. “I am a poor man with a big family to keep and I hold Miss Mortimer-Beltane in such respect; I can say nothing else—no, not if I wur hung for it.”

“‘Tis not a hanging matter,” remarked David curtly. “But see to it, Mr. Landlord, that your stick instils better manners into those children.”

Then the cousins rode away, Nat Cockspur watching their going before he sought his riding crop and his scattered family; he chastised those he caught with impartial severity.

A stone's throw out on either hand  
From that well-ordered road we tread,  
And all the world is wild and strange;  
Churel and ghoul and djinn and sprite  
Shall bear us company to-night,  
For we have reached the Oldest Land  
Wherein the powers of Darkness range."

KIPLING.

## CHAPTER X

### A WALK IN THE GARDEN

CHRISTMAS festivities were many in the charming village of Hampstead, the most favourite residential quarter in the country outside London.

Invitations for dances and evening parties came to Belit Place that winter, the magic of Lycanthia's youth and foreign ancestry intriguing the country hostesses.

David Scrymgeour was keen to enjoy himself and in accepting for him Miss Julia was obliged to include Lycanthia.

The most important function in the neighbourhood was a Christmas Eve Ball given by Lord and Lady Kerr-Mornington at Hopetown Park.

"It is a country house family ball, which includes grandparents and young ladies not yet out," announced Miss Julia.

"But I have no ball dress, auntie."

"One shall be ordered at once."

Miss Julia and her niece drove that morning to Madame Doublebois in Regent Street, but once seated in the bright little saloon a difference of opinion immediately arose between Miss Mortimer-Beltane, Madame Doublebois and Lycanthia.

The elder lady supported by the experienced taste of the French modiste, wished Lycanthia to select a white tarlatan, but she equally firmly refused the ethereal material as being unbecoming.

“I am not a feminine girl,” she said, “muslins,

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laces or tarlatans are unsuitable. Let me have this pale fawn shot silk, made full in the skirt and of ankle length.”

“Impossible, Mademoiselle, for a first ball! Unheard of for a *jeune demoiselle*.”

Madame was distressed at such blundering. Fawn shot silk! A sober colour suitable for a matron of respectability or for a widow just re-entering society.

Madame trusted Miss Mortimer-Beltane would not permit such an atrocity.

But without undue volubility Lycanthia’s dress was ordered as she directed; Madame retired from the contest, assigning the carrying out of all instructions to her second assistant.

“With that coloured silk I must wear bronze slippers and silk stockings to match the silk.”

The shoes were ordered at Halbertons in Regent Street. A slight difficulty arose over the measurements.

“Very unusual,” remarked the saleswoman. “I would prefer Mr. Halberton to attend to this himself.” For no less important a customer than Miss Mortimer-Beltane would Mr. Halberton have condescended to stoop to the measuring of a young lady’s feet. But as he plied tape measure and foot-rule trade interest awakened. In all his experience he had not seen so long a foot with such a spread of toes, and so narrowly attenuated an arch; the heel was firm but not fiat.



“Well,” he said at last, “the young lady has an uniquely formed foot.” Gently tapping the toes concealed by a dark-coloured cashmere stocking, “the toes are of an unusual inflexibility. May I ask, miss, if as a child you went about bare-footed?”

“Sometimes,” Lycanthia laughed, “oh! yes, in the summer always in sandals; in the winter sometimes in clogs.”

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“Well, those articles of footwear may account for the apparent strength of your toes. In making the slippers it will be necessary for a last of the feet to be made first.”

“Will the slippers be completed in time for the ball?”

“Certainly, miss. The order will go through at once.”

The selection of the stockings was more difficult. Silk stockings were luxuries indulged in only by the wealthy for state functions or important social occasions. Miss Mortimer-Beltane was obliged to entrust their procuring to Madame Doublebois, as a pair had to be specially dyed.

“It will be advisable to have three pairs. The cost of dyeing three will not be more than dyeing one,” said the autocrat, not ill-pleased at her services proving indispensable to the obstinate young lady. “And if I might suggest, what I consider an improvement in the sombre garment chosen by Mademoiselle, a few knots of cerise velvet ribbon in the folds of the skirt and at the back of each sleeve, and, if Mademoiselle permits,

a snood for confining her hair, which I see is ample and slightly wavy.”

Lycanthia received the suggestion with an amused twist of her mouth.

“My taste is not English.”

“Nor is mine,” swiftly asserted the dressmaker. “Hélas! English ladies are devoid of artistry in dress. They clothe themselves—but what dowdiness! Have a care, Mademoiselle, that their dullness does not infect you. You have possibilities, oh certainly! I shall hope you will in the future permit me to reveal them to you.”

As the ladies drove back to Hampstead Miss Mortimer-Beltane indulged herself by imagining her long-past youth had revived itself through the coming

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of her years-young niece. She felt herself to be the *debutante*, just launching with the timidity of ignorance, on to the vast sea of social events as yet unplumbed. The sensation was disturbing. What real influence could she have over this deliberately-poised mentality, whose working baffled her at every point?

She sighed in perplexity.

“Fatigued, auntie?”

Lycanthia’s voice was kind. Her feelings toward her English aunt were condescendingly forbearing. They were not deep, not even understanding, but she had been brought up in an atmosphere which for its centre held Julia Mortimer-Beltane. Her father’s memories, whether sane or sober, were tinged by the hopeless

passion of his maturity, kept alive by the daily presence of a common bond.

Miss Julia broke away from her personal musings. “Fatigued?” she echoed, “certainly not. A short drive and a little shopping? No, my thoughts were wandering—nothing more.”

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That evening the moon rose soon after eight o’clock—a luminous globe in a deeply blue sky. The blinds in the dining-room were kept up, and the silver rays of the moon mingled fantastically with the golden light from the hanging-lamp over the dining-table and the wax candles.

Lycanthia grew restless before the conclusion of the meal. She trifled with the food placed before her, a few spoonfuls of soup—two morsels of fish—no meat course and a tiny sample of the sweet. Watching her, Miss Julia expected her withdrawal from the table as many times during the meal Lycanthia half rose from her chair, then re-settled herself with an effort only to repeat her restless movements immediately.

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As the men servants left the dining-room Lycanthia rose.

“Auntie, will you excuse me? I have a headache. I will go into the garden and see the ducks, the air will do me good.”

“See the ducks?” impulsively echoed David, “why, they’ve been in their house for hours.”

She looked at him angrily, her pale-coloured eyes glowing redly in the cross lights on the table.

“Ducks never sleep through the night like poultry; they love the moonlight, but shut up in that house they can’t get out.”

Miss Julia ignored the interchange of remarks between the young people. She did not approve of Lycanthia going out into the cold winter night air, but she forbore to forbid it. Instinctively she sensed her impotence to rule this girl. She said—

“The night is cold; you have only eaten a few mouthfuls of dinner; you are in a condition to get a chill. Be sensible and wrap up.”

“To please you, I will.” She laughed—a short, abrupt sound, harsh, even repelling. David opened the door for her, looking doubtfully at Miss Julia, who was still seated at the table.

She replied to the question obvious from his attitude.

“Yes, go with her, but slip on a coat, the air is cold outside.”

Lycanthia looked at him as he passed out.

“Come if you like, but I am always happy alone.” The invitation was not cordial, but David was neither sensitive nor discerning.

In the garden, full of deep shadows where the moonlight failed to illuminate, the air was coldly silent.

“The ducks must be asleep now,” he said. “There’s not a sound from the house.”

“They’re listening.” She paused before a giant

rhododendron bush, then looked towards the moon. “David,” she whispered, “have you witches and wizards in Scotland?”

Coming from her—the hard-riding, self-assured Polish cousin, smoker of cigars and cigarettes, the drinker of wine and liqueurs—the question startled him.

“Good Lord! no.” The exclamation was decidedly “Eton” superiority. “Surely you didn’t come out in this cold to look for such rubbish?”

She eyed him obliquely.

“I never look for ‘rubbish.’”

“Well, then, you said ‘ducks.’”

She laughed.

“Yes, ducks. But I only want one.”

“Whatever for?”

“You shall see.”

They reached the ducks’ house at the west side of the lake; a stone sundial marked the spot, conspicuous in the bright moonlight.

“Lend me your penknife,” she said holding out her hand. “The catch is stiff, I must force it back.”

“How did you know I had a knife? I seldom carry one in my evening trouser pocket.”

“I guessed you had one.”

“Better let me loosen the catch. But, I say, Lycanthia, what do you want with a duck at this hour of the night?”

“I will show you a little Polish superstition.”

He shivered.

“Well, hurry up then, it’s beastly cold, and you in your thin dress and shoes.” He touched her hand,

holding the knife, "Good Lord, how hot you are!"

She pushed him away.

"I'm no pampered English girl to freeze in a little moonlight." As she spoke she unfastened the wooden

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door, thrusting her hand into the dark interior of the house. Immediately she drew one of the famed Portuguese ducks out, smothering its attempted indignant squeaks by holding its scarlet bill firmly closed.

"Now then," questioned David, "what next?" Then he cautioned—"Shut the door or the whole lot'll be out."

Her movements were so rapid his slower injunctions were scarcely spoken before the door was again latched. He held out his hand for his knife. He was attached to that knife and he didn't want it dropped in the lake. The struggling bird was difficult to handle.

She took no notice of his words. Her long legs made one stride to the north side of the stone dial; she placed the duck—quieter by reason of its constricted breathing—on the top of the column. In the darkness it was difficult for the disgruntled boy to see what actually happened, but the next moment the head of the duck, severed from its body, lay a dark spot on the stone. She held the convulsed bundle of feathers above the dial.

"All hail!" she cried. Then followed a medley of words he did not understand. The light from the moon shone for a moment on her upturned face; the ecstasy

depicted exasperated him after the cruelly wanton act of butchering the Portuguese duck.

“Good Lord! Lycanthia,” he shouted, “are you mad? I call this beastly. A Polish system you said? Why you are only half-civilized to do such a thing! Kill one of Cousin Julia’s ducks! What are you going to say to her?”

The deep shadows in the garden were responsible for a slight confusion in his perceptions. The ray of moonlight moved away from Lycanthia; it seemed to him as though something more alive than the reflection

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of the tree trunks towered above her. He frowned at his unspoken conjecture.

“Hand over my knife,” he growled, “it may be messy; I’ll clean it on the grass.”

She dropped it beside the duck house. Picking it up, not too eagerly, he stuck the blade into the earth in a flower-bed, drawing it to and fro.

His cleaning operation finished, he stood up. Lycanthia had not moved from the sundial, her face was still upturned to the moonlit sky.

David looked at her.

“Moonstruck,” he murmured, “heard of the condition but never believed in it.” He moved nearer, putting his hand on the one of hers which still enfolded the still body of the duck. It was stiff and cold. His imagination ran riot. He fancied she was held by a condensed shadow where no shadow could possibly be. A sense of masculine responsibility for feminine

helplessness induced him to strike out—the open penknife in his hand.

“Of course,” he told himself unconvincingly afterwards, “it was just all rot, but I could swear there was resistance in that shadow.”

Then Lycanthia moved.

“Come to life,” he described her actions to himself, “dashed if I ever go in the garden again at night with her.”

“Well, David,” she said, “what are you doing?”

“Better ask yourself that,” he retorted. “I suppose you’ll say: ‘Doing one of your Polish customs.’ Well, I don’t like them.”

She was looking at the body of the dead duck and made no answer.

“How are you going to explain that to Cousin Julia?”

“I shan’t say anything to-night. Maga will keep

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it——” she seemed to fall back into her semi-cataleptic state—“till later; to-morrow or sometime I will tell auntie.”

“If you don’t one of the gardeners will get the blame.” Boy-like, he was thoroughly annoyed at a situation he did not understand.

Slowly they returned to the house. She left him at the door, going upstairs, and he went to the cloakroom to wash his hands before rejoining Miss Julia in the drawing-room.

“Well, David, was it very cold in the garden?”



“Rather! Pottering about round the lake is different from going for a quick run over the heath.”

“And where is Lycanthia?”

“Gone upstairs to speak to that Polish maid. I say, Cousin Julia, do you like that woman? I’ve only seen her once but there’s something about her I don’t like.”

“She is Polish; the Poles are a different race from the English, possibly we don’t quite understand them. Maga was Lycanthia’s nurse and comes from a family of foresters on Count Kritzulesco’s estate. I think the Count knew all about her when he engaged her.”

“Well, I don’t like her!” David was decided. “Not that that matters, I know, still——” He left his chaotic opinions at that. Miss Julia did not ask him for more definite ones. She shared his doubts, but hesitated to express them. In any case she doubted her power to enforce them.

“We meet in an evil land  
That is near to the gates of hell  
I wait for thy command  
To serve, to speed or understand.”

“This I saw when the rites were done.  
And the lamps were dead and the Gods alone.  
And the grey snake coiled on the altar stone—  
Ere I fled from a Fear that I could not see.  
And the Gods of the East made mouths at me.”

KIPLING.

## CHAPTER XI

### NEXT MORNING — THE PROWLER IN THE GARDEN

MISS MORTIMER-BELTANE and David breakfasted alone the following morning, Lycanthia sending one of her little notes excusing herself on the plea of one of her severe headaches.

Miss Julia was worried.

“I cannot understand,” she confided to David, “how my niece gets so many headaches. They are frequent and severe. Sometimes she remains in a darkened room for three days—quite prostrate. Probably she did not feel able to eat much dinner last evening for this cause.”

David almost told Miss Julia of the extraordinary happenings in the garden the preceding evening, but refrained out of diffidence for her feelings; privately he wondered if Lycanthia was “dotty” and if her headaches were part of a disease. Disliking to involve himself in a domestic mystery, he said nothing, eating stolidly through his breakfast.

“We might ride at eleven, the weather is clear. Suppose you go to the stables and choose your own horse.”

David acted on Miss Julia’s suggestion, and in desultory gossip with Smith whiled away the interval between breakfast and meeting her at the front door with the horses.

“Lycanthia still in her room?” he asked as they rode down the drive.

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“Yes, I went up to see her, but Maga said she was sleeping so I did not disturb her.”

Luncheon for two was served directly they returned to the house. Later Miss Julia drove down to London to do some shopping and David returned to the stables and the horses for amusement.

As they sat at dinner, David wondered if Miss Julia knew about the missing duck, and if she did, and mentioned it to him, what he should say. This possibility made him uncomfortable, but the incident was not mentioned. He sincerely hoped Miss Julia knew nothing about it.

After dinner they adjourned to the Chinese Parlour, Miss Julia’s favourite sitting-room. She sat down by the fire and commenced some needlework, and David stretched his long legs out, over the white bearskin rug, to the welcome glow from the fire. He was not inclined to read, but pleasantly fatigued from the long ride in the morning and prepared to enjoy the firelight and his cousin’s interesting conversation.

The shutters before the long French windows were not closed, as Miss Julia liked to see the moonlight across the lake when the nights were clear.

David listened to Miss Julia’s comments on many subjects, Eton, his home, his health, the various hunts she was interested in; several times he dozed off—then opened his eyes and forced himself to appear attentive.

Suddenly his somnolent senses woke to life. His fascinated gaze was attracted to an unusually large dog, of a breed unknown to him, looking furtively in at them from the outside of the window.

"I say!" he exclaimed, sitting up in the easy-chair he was lolling in, "what an enormous dog."

Miss Julia's eyes followed the direction of his; she looked startled.

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"It is not one of ours."

The dog, knowing it was observed, retreated backwards until it disappeared into the bushes.

David went to the window.

"Do you mind if I follow the brute?" he asked, laying his hand on the hasp of the window fastener.

A warning instinct made Miss Julia say premonitorily:

"No, David, do not open the window. The air is so cold. Go out by the garden door, if you like, but take a stick or something."

By the time David got into the garden the dog had disappeared, but walking lightly round the house and across the drive towards the enclosed bit of garden reserved for Lycanthia's dog, he fancied he heard the click of a closing door.

"Dogs don't shut doors," he told himself, "I expect that dog's owner wasn't far off. I'll pass the word to the butler to see everything is securely fastened up to-night."

Nothing further happened. David rejoined his cousin in the Chinese room, where the shutters were

closed and barred and a few moments later they went to bed.

One outcome of the strange dog's visit was that the gardener missed the Portuguese duck the next morning and ascribed its absence to the dog or the dog's probable owner.

David kept his own counsel, leaving Lycanthia to supply enlightenment if she chose, but as she kept to her own room, he had no opportunity of finding out what she meant to do or say. He decided it was not of importance anyway—a dead duck and a strange dog! The disturbing factor was Lycanthia's curious behaviour, her almost jocular cruelty. But he could not give her away over that. He supposed it was her

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own affair, and as the prowling dog was credited with the loss, and no harm done to anyone by concealing the truth—why, best leave it alone.

When Lycanthia did come down to the drawing-room two days later, David, metaphorically, “patted himself on the back” in approval of his forbearance.

Even his slow observation was shocked at her appearance of extreme exhaustion. Her hair, eyes and skin were of the same pallid colour, and she looked drained of vitality.

“Gosh!” he exclaimed, regarding her in dismay, “those headaches of yours must be something quite special.”

She raised her heavy eyelids.

“Don't make remarks before Aunt Julia, I am over the worst, to-morrow I shall be quite myself. She is

always asking me to see her doctor, but all my life I have had these headaches and Maga knows what to do.”

“Perhaps you’ll grow out of them,” said David hopefully. “People do grow out of illnesses you know.”

The occasion of Lycanthia’s first ball in England created a certain amount of pleasure and excitement in the household.

Miss Julia had commented on her niece’s unusual taste in dress to her maid, so the upper servants already knew of it.

Its arrival from the dressmaker provided a private view, but the bronze slippers were not too favourably criticised, they were unusual, satin slippers were the correct wear for young ladies of fashion.

What disturbed everyone, including Miss Julia, was the non-arrival of the specially dyed stockings.

Until four o’clock of the auspicious day their delivery tarried. A mounted groom was despatched

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to Regent Street and he did not return until seven o’clock—one half-hour before dinner.

So anxious was Miss Julia that the stockings were brought to her and she, after satisfying herself that they were of the correct colour, took them up to Lycanthia’s room.

The young lady was not perturbed. Already dressed in the much debated gown she was smoking one of her large cigars, amusing herself by stroking and playing with the short ears of her great hound, who was stretched out on the floor beside her chair.

“Oh, Auntie, you should not have brought them yourself,” she exclaimed. “Besides, if only I had thought a little, Maga could have tinted a pair of white silk stockings in tea.”

“Never mind now. Slip them on and let me see the whole effect.”

Lycanthia drew up her ruched taffeta skirt, revealing a leg liberally covered in bruises. Miss Julia exclaimed in horror—

“Lycanthia, what have you been doing? Why those dreadful scratches and purple marks will show through the silk.”

Lycanthia stretched out her leg, looking at it amusedly.

“It’s nothing. My legs always are a mass of bruises. I suppose I get them in bed.”

Maga glided between her young mistress and Miss Julia.

“Tis’ naught, noble lady,” she said. “The young mistress, she is restless at nights.”

“If,” responded Miss Julia haughtily, “Miss Lycanthia acquires those unsightly marks during her sleep, there must be something very wrong with her skin. Probably her headache and those spots—or bruises—or scratches—are due to the same cause”

The maid was kneeling before the seated girl, deftly drawing on the stockings. She muttered some words rapidly to her mistress who, with a laugh repeated their meaning to Miss Julia.



“Maga says you are not to be alarmed; from babyhood my skin bruises easily.”

“I am never certain how much English your Polish maid understands.”

Miss Julia disliked the narrow features of the kneeling woman. To her prejudiced watchfulness slyness pervaded her whole person, also a suggestion of latent strength, triumphant in its secretiveness.

“Quite a lot, but her tongue is stiff in explaining herself.”

Miss Julia was not certain she desired greater fluency from Maga. Her silence was sufficiently expressive and wholly disagreeable. As she understood more clearly the authoritative domination of Maga over her niece, she grew to resent it. The process had been gradual, its inception dating from her first glimpse of the black coiffed woman in the hall on her arrival.

Reasoned justice had influenced a softened opinion towards one she distrusted as being adverse to Lycanthia’s happiness.

As a black mote in her niece’s future she saw her. Yet with no cause beyond that of a woman’s intuition.

Wide though her social experience was, her education and outlook more comprehensive than her contemporaries, owing to her clever father’s constant companionship, in the guidance of her dead sister’s daughter she felt herself impotent. Why? She did not know.

In all outward appearances she ruled. But within her court was planted a secret power which silently scoffed at her ignorance, pursuing its activities.

disdaining more concealment than sufficed to baffle an opposition.

The (obviously) stupid incident of the stockings chagrined her! something bordering on the ridiculous. Yet she knew, behind that which seemed foolish, lay a clue she could not capture.

She returned to the drawing-room. Standing by the glowing log fire she looked earnestly into the flames, seeking she knew not what. Was it the solution of a difficulty? She fingered over the word. Certainly her dead Polish brother-in-law had provided one in sending to her care his young daughter.

“If only she had come to me earlier,” she told herself, “at a more adaptable age, when I could have removed an influence so hostile to me! Of what use can I be with that woman forever between us?”

She remembered suddenly the claimed blood-relationship which was almost certainly true. In itself an unbreakable bond, with affection to weld it together. Each time she saw Maga with her young mistress she was conscious of her devotion, unreasoning, even fiercely savage, but such as it was, rapacious in intensity.

Lycanthia and David came into the room together. Miss Julia noted with approval the colour and texture of the pale beige taffeta, which well became its wearer.

Lycanthia’s elusiveness pronounced its quality; handsome she was not, yet she suggested its possibility. Over all, her person, her dress, her

atmosphere, she radiated a mysterious vitality which commanded attention and challenged criticism.

“Perhaps it is best for a girl to be interesting rather than ordinarily good-looking,” she told herself, “yet it is safer to be one of the crowd. Lycanthia never can be that.”

This reflection afforded her no satisfaction.

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The drive to Hopetown Park, the other side of Highgate, took Miss Julia’s fast-trotting greys forty minutes.

“Why the greys?” inquired Lycanthia as she followed her cousin into the roomy double brougham.

“Why not my favourite bays? They have not been out for three days.”

“Smith prefers the greys for night work; I generally allow him to choose what horses to use.”

“He’s a jolly good man, Cousin Julia,” commented David. “I’ve picked up a lot of hints going round the stables this week.”

Lycanthia’s dress at the ball did not rouse adverse comments; rather was it admired by ladies curious as to the fashions. But she was not a success with her dancing partners. Later in the evening she pressed several unsophisticated youths to spend the dance periods on the terrace despite the frosty temperature. David steadily refused to leave the ballroom. The lengthening time between the senseless killing of the duck and the present moment consolidated his repugnance of the whole episode. The mystic strain in his Scottish ancestry predisposed him to conclusions

he preferred to forget. There had been something repellingly odd by the sundial, something which affected him, though in a lesser degree to Lycanthia's semi-cataleptic condition.

He turned resolutely away from the risk of repetition.

"If there's any more of it," he muttered to himself, "I shan't be sorry to get back to Eton."

Curiously he watched each disappearance of Lycanthia from the ballroom; observation was easy as he had been forbidden to dance, and strolling through the rooms as an onlooker was uninteresting.

But either Lycanthia had no inducement to depart from the normal, or the youths assigned to her as

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partners were too stolidly unsympathetic, the brief intervals of her association with them passed in the ordinary ballroom courtesies. David, understandingly approved the barrenness of her garden strolls. He so far pitied her as to propose their going into supper together—an informal function owing to the family parties attending the ball.

As they drove back to Hampstead over the wintry heath, the late rising moon illuminated the roadway to the extinguishing of the light from the carriage lamps.

"Oh! for a gallop," exclaimed Lycanthia impulsively. "David, shall we?"

"No thanks. I've no wish for a moonlight ride. Besides my lung is rather a hold-up for the night air."

"You cannot ride by night. The heath is dangerous. My horses do not know it, nor its uneven surface."

Lycanthia sighed.

“This proper England! No wonder, auntie, you refused my father. We Poles have something untamed in us. I feel it.” She pressed her hands against her breast. “It is here. I can’t be calm like you.” A note of pain ran through her husky voice. Miss Julia took her hand in one of hers.

“Dear child, what can I say or do? Try a little longer to bear with our English customs. You must inherit something from your English mother.”

“Only her pain and her regrets! What else was there from her marriage? They neither knew peace! He longed for the unattainable; she for his love. Seeking and never finding; that is my heritage.”

The outburst affrighted Miss Julia. The excited girl laid bare her soul, speaking out in one emotional torrent the secret trouble of her young life.

The thwarted ambitions of her unhappy parents had shadowed her youth. This she made plain. What could be said by those outside her experiences?

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Miss Julia grieved at her own impotence. The clasp of her hand over the twitching hardness of the excited girl’s was her only possible expression of sympathy.

When they reached Belit Place Lycanthia murmured a curt good-night and rushed upstairs to her room, leaving her aunt and cousin standing in the hall.

“Well,” remarked David thoughtfully, “I’m glad I’m British! It must be jolly uncomfortable to feel like two people shut up in the same skin.” He was remembering the unforgettable happening in the garden; that might

be the explanation of what he imagined he saw. Certainly Lycanthia became less of a puzzle, though he felt no nearer to her; she still held him off.

Miss Julia interrupted his somnolent musings.

“Good night, David, or is it good morning?”

“I suppose so as it has gone two. What time breakfast?”

“To-morrow nine o’clock, as the upper servants go to the eleven o’clock service.”

“Of course! Christmas Day! Good luck, Cousin Julia and many thanks.”

The household settled down to repose.

“’Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn, and Hell itself breathes out  
Contagion to this world “—

HAMLET.

“Black spirits and white,  
Red spirits and gray,  
Mingle, mingle, mingle.  
You that mingle may.

“By the pricking of my thumbs  
Something wicked this way comes:  
Open, locks, whoever knocks,”

MACBETH.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE KILLING OF THE HORSES

**I**F you please, miss, Mr. Smith has a message for you."

Miss Julia opened her eyes, looking at the tense face of her maid beside her bed. The room was still in semi-darkness with the night-light flickering in the basin.

"What is the time, Alice?"

"Seven o'clock, miss."

"Then what is the matter?"

"Mr. Smith said you must be told. It happened about five o'clock and he has waited two hours to let you have a sleep."

Miss Julia sat up in bed. The dawn was not even showing between the Venetian blinds; Christmas Day was slow in awakening.

The maid lighted the candles on the dressing-table. She was clad in a flannel dressing-gown, her hair hastily coiled round her head.

"I am thoroughly awake now. What is the matter?"

"Mr. Smith is in great trouble. Some murdering ruffian got into the stables after he put the horses away, between half-past two and five o'clock, and both the barouche bays are so bitten about he says they must be killed. Only he didn't like to do it without letting you know."

"Bitten? But how?"

"By some savage dog—or dogs."



“Not Dlugoss,” said Miss Julia hastily; “I rather like that dog; he looks savage but has never shown signs of vice.”

“That is what everyone asked at first—could it be Dlugoss? Mr. Smith went at once to the Polish person’s room, but Dlugoss was quietly stretched out across the landing. Mr. Smith looked him well over; if he was the guilty animal he must be marked.”

Miss Julia was obviously relieved. She was dressing as rapidly as excitement permitted.

“Those horses are a serious loss, miss; Mr. Smith says they cost four hundred guineas last year.”

“The loss is severe, but the horrible manner in which they have been treated is worse.”

Miss Julia descended the stairs to find the coachman awaiting her. He was visibly upset; a muffler twisted round his neck was eloquent testimony as to that. He, the doyen of the stables, to appear before his employer without a collar and tie.

“What has happened, Smith?”

The man’s face worked convulsively; he loved his horses.

“‘Tis a shocking sight, miss. I wouldn’t like you to see it. Both these fine hosses well-nigh tore to pieces. Great strips out of their throats and the near hoss all worried and tore from his belly to his tail. You never saw such a cruel mess. He’s dead—the other poor creature must be put out of his misery; I’ve sent for Brenton, the vet., I can’t do it myself.”

“But how did it happen? Who did it?”

“A great hulking, hairy dog. It was this way, Miss Julia, one of the grooms, Joseph—the one who lives in the village—was up to help with the horses when we got back from Highgate. The hosses were put up by two-thirty; Joseph didn’t want to get off home at that hour—‘fraid of waiting his missus and the baby,

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so he dossed down in the hay-loft, above the bays. It was just afore five o’clock he heard a great to-do in the stables, growls, the hosses stamping, then one gave a blood-curdling cry—’twas the poor’ near’ one as it turned out. Joseph seized a long pitchfork and crept to the trap-door opening and looked down.

“There’s only the jet of gas over the stable-door kept alight at night so there warn’t much light to see by. The door was open. Below, Joseph saw both the hosses and something—a long, dark shape like a big dog—jumping about on them two poor hosses, growling something horrid and tearing away at them.

“Joseph shouted and threw the fork down on the brute, fair forgetting he might stick it in one of my poor hosses. The savage brute stopped his beastly work and made for the door. Joseph said it was a dog—a big fellow—with a long pointed head, not square like Miss Lycanthia’s dog; but he knows he hit it with the fork.” The man ceased, overcome with the recital of that night’s tragedy.

Miss Julia drew in her breath.

“For a moment I thought it might be Dlugoss.”

“No, Joseph is positive it warn’t him. He knows the hound. Besides, I went after him at once. No dog could

do what's been done in our stables this night without getting bloody—'twasn't possible. But Dlugoss hasn't a spot nor a scratch on him."

"Well, Smith, I do not think I wish to come over to the stables. I shrink from seeing my poor horses in the plight you describe. Let Mr. Brenton do what is right; I can trust you and him in the matter. Later you must let Superintendent Pearson know."

"Oh, oi, the police must be told. That ravening brute won't stop at our hosses. Once a dog starts worrying sheep or hosses nothing stops them but the

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gun. Four hundred guineas gone in less than twenty minutes!"

Miss Julia returned to her own room to await her usual breakfast hour. Neither Lycanthia nor David were roused before the usual time, though they were the only members of the household in ignorance of the disorder in the stables.

David was ten minutes late, his unruly mop of hair suggesting to his cousin a total neglect of a hair-brush in performing what she suspected was a perfunctory toilet.

Her news upset his already meagre appetite. He was fond of horses and the big barouche bays had provoked his admiration.

"I say, Cousin Julia, what rotten luck! Does Lycanthia know?"

"I don't think so, but she is not up."

"How sick she'll be! She liked those bays. Only yesterday she said if they were hers she'd use them

oftener. Of course that beastly dog must be found. Someone must own him, he can't be a 'stray,' he's too strong to be ill-fed."

"Smith is notifying the police at once."

David got up from the table.

"Will you excuse me? This has rather taken my breath away. Do you mind if I go to the stables?"

Miss Julia assured him she understood his curiosity. She sipped a small cup of tea and ate a few inches of toast.

He paused by the door.

"When Lycanthia comes down, will you tell her I am at the stables? She'll be sure to come over there. She doesn't mind nasty sights."

Miss Julia nodded an affirmation; she was feeling emotionally disturbed by the events of the morning.

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She loved all her horses; to some extent they represented a maternal focus in her life; certainly they provided her widest interest.

She sat at the breakfast-table until ten o'clock, sorting her Christmas mail and reading family letters. Then her maid brought a folded slip of paper, saying:

"From the Polish person. Miss Lycanthia has another headache and begs to be excused coming to breakfast."

Miss Julia gathered up letters and parcels and took them into the morning-room. Standing before the glowing fire she thought over the events of the ball, the calamitous death of her valuable carriage horses and Lycanthia's troublesome headaches.

But Christmas morning was an ill time for personal retrospection! She rang the bell and ordered the brougham and brown horses to take her to church. The stables might be in an uproar, her coachman distracted and the horses excited by the unusual commotion—but Christmas Day, coming but once a year, claimed her unswerving respect.

David, mindful of his mother's instruction to study his cousin Julia's wishes, tore himself away from the disgruntled lugubriousness of the stable-yard, agog to solve the mystery of the fatal savaging of the bay horses.

The vet arrived before David quitted the stable. He supported the groom's assertion of the presence in the stable of some ferocious dog from his examination of the wounds on the two horses.

"A powerful brute it must 'a' bin," he said, "but the horses were easy prey, fastened up for the night—not that they'd a chance anywheres with a mad killer tackling 'em."

To Smith's inquiries as to whether he knew of any possible dog in the neighbourhood likely to be the one, he disclaimed all knowledge.

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"A brute like that might travel miles—twenty as like as four. Your young lady's hound I take it, is not suspected?"

"No; he was sleeping in the house safely barred in."

"Besides, mister," interrupted the groom who witnessed the tragedy, "that 'ere dog was a lot bigger

than our 'ound—is 'ead wor long and pointed, not square like Dlugoss's."

"Light a bit faint, warn't it? That gas jet don't give much light."

"Plenty 'nough to see 'twar a stranger dawg. Mighty spry 'e war too. He sprang and 'e savaged, making the beastliest row when 'is mouth weren't buried in the pore 'osses' flesh! Gawd! If only I could have got at 'im——" The man swore volubly.

"He'd 'a' got you, too," replied the vet. decidedly. "A gun's the only thing to stop a killer-dog." Then turning to Smith. "The police may know if there are other complaints out about a big dog. I'll let the hunts know. We shan't be long before getting on his tracks."

But inquiries made for miles round Hampstead failed to locate the savage culprit. Out of the cold Christmas night he had come, and back into its frosted shadows he had gone.

Mr. Smith hovered uncertainly round the many back entrances to Belit Place, seeking for betraying signs of the passing of the killer-dog. Such animals were cunning almost past belief, and there had been time for the Polish hound to steal to and fro between house and stables on his ghastly errand. But all those outlets had been securely locked and bolted, the possible windows were barred and the gate in the wall, through which the Polish maid took Dlugoss for his exercise over the heath, was bolted on the inside.

Also his careful inspection of the drowsy hound, lying so quietly on the landing, outside Maga's bedroom,

revealed nothing suspicious even to a prejudiced searcher—as Smith was.

“It’s a blank draw ’ere,” he told himself miserably, “and yet something draws me right up to this place.”

He gave a questioning look at the dog; Dlugoss looked at him unperturbed, yet inquiringly.

The Polish maid’s door opened. Her black-coiffed head showed in the aperture. Seeing the coachman standing where his duties did not call him, she said:

“What do you want, eh?”

“Bin taking a look at the dog,” he muttered. His authoritative position in the household precluded any feeling of awkwardness. Maga was only the maid of the mistress’s niece, and a foreigner at that!

“You go ‘way—dog not ill. No one ask you.”

Unwillingly he admitted to himself his presence there, and at that hour, did need explanation. He shook his head, he was not going to make one to her, nor satisfy her curiosity. Be hanged if he would. He retreated slowly by the back stairs. Maga watched him until he was out of sight, then she closed her door.

Enlightenment came to her later in the morning through the fourth housemaid, whose duty it was to wait on “Miss Lycanthia’s nurse.”

Searchingly she watched the excited girl, trying to force understanding upon herself. As the mists of the girl’s badly-expressed English cleared, through a laboured speech due to faulty diction and a distorted jaw, Maga grasped the significance of the coachman’s visit to her landing.

“‘orses killed! By savage dog!” she exclaimed. Then turning to Dlugoss stretched out in his favourite

place on the landing, "But not 'im; Dlugoss slep' 'ere, 'e's good dog."

"The beautiful barouche 'orses tore to bits and blood over everything," repeated the little maid, delighted

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to have the privilege of being the first to impart such thrilling news. "Mr. Smith, 'e fair cried," she nodded her mob-capped head importantly, "and Mrs. Scott 'llowed us all to run up to the stables and 'ave a look"—warming to her story—"and there's lots of folks there, half the village and Mr. Nat Cockspur and five o' hisen in the yard. I seed Mr. David too."

Maga turned to the privacy of her own room.

"I no 'ear more," she warned, "go long."

"Does Miss Lycanthia know?" queried the maid. "She'd be the one to send after that dog-killer."

"Miss Lycanthia sleep, 'ead bad. She stay quiet," replied the woman gruffly. "Now you go; no more do." She pushed the girl resolutely towards the top of the back stairs, "me finish work."

Gladly the little maid skipped down the stairs. It was Christmas Day, Miss Julia lunched at one and the staff at two o'clock, sitting down to a festive board adjudged suitable for the greatest day in the Christian calendar.

Below in the hall, on returning from church, David questioned Miss Julia as to Lycanthia's indisposition.

"Won't she be down? What rotten luck on Christmas day! Does she know about the horses?"



“I have not seen her this morning. As a rule, when these headaches come on, she goes up to her nurse and rests in the bedroom on the garden side of the house. Maga seems to know how to manage her.” Miss Julia’s face betrayed dissatisfaction. Then impulsively she said, “I do not like that Polish woman; something about her repels me—yet she is devoted to Lycanthia.” She laughed. “An old maid like me finds it difficult to understand young people.”

Politeness urged David to dispute her description of herself as “an old maid.”

“Not so very old, Cousin Julia! Why you looked

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miles handsomer than lots of the girls at the dance,” he floundered badly, “I expect it’s the dress and the way you put your things on. I shouldn’t be a bit surprised if someone wanted to marry you yet.”

“Thank you, David, for your complimentary way of expressing yourself, but I shall never marry. The next marriage from this house will be Lycanthia’s—at least, I hope so.”

David’s masculine mind flew back to the scene in the garden at the killing of the duck. He drew back from the prospect of securing Lycanthia, or any girl with her peculiarities as a bride. Secure in his youth, he dallied with the idea of a possible, but, as yet, unknown suitor visualized by his cousin for the invalid upstairs.

“Will Lycanthia have any money?” was his next question. A well-dowered girl, even with the taint of

butchery in her, would be welcomed by a man on the lookout for bawbees.

“Very little; her father was a rich man when he married my sister, but the money has vanished.”

“I suppose if a fellow married Lycanthia her nurse would go with her. A bit of a jar that.” David was unconsciously showing his sympathy with Miss Julia’s dislike for the Polish maid.

“A man makes great differences in a woman’s life,” she answered him absently,” but only a man can break Maga’s influence over my niece.”

“Let’s hope a likely one comes along soon.” David was not an applicant for the position; he regarded the matter impersonally, but he was of the decided opinion that marriage was a panacea for nearly all women’s idiosyncrasies.

“The flash and outbreak of a fiery mind;  
A savageness in unreclaimed blood.”

HAMLET.

“Month after month”—he cried—“to bear this load  
And, as a jade urged by the whip a goad,  
To drag.”

SHELLEY.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE WOUNDING OF DLUGOSS

NAT COCKSPUR was not finding life too easy. To found a family was simple—any fool can achieve that. To keep a family—especially one running into fifteen heads—feed, clothe and get boots for them, was another matter, and a mightily unpleasant one. He compromised on the boots. The children must go barefooted! Why not? In Scotland they did. Why not in Hampstead? He asked the question trenchantly, first of his protesting self, and then of any member of his household sufficiently interested to listen.

Mrs. Cockspur's interest was strictly limited to her own offspring. Cockspur's legitimate ones might fend for themselves; they were capable of doing it. Already prompted thereto by the innuendoes of mischief-loving minds, they were asserting their priority rights to their father's possessions and his name.

"You ain't Cockspur's," they would say on any occasion, suitable or otherwise, when for a reason discernible only to themselves, they felt an urge to rub the distasteful fact in. "You're little Smallpieces— yer ma's name."

“Tiddly, tiddly. Smallpiece,  
Ye can’t diddle a Cockspur!  
Don’t you wish you could sit on a dish,  
Ram in a skewer and call it a fish?  
When all the folks know you might get a share  
As small as a piece of a Cockspur.”

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Who the author of this provocative doggerel was, no one knew; probably it grew from the first two fines, when childish discussions formed separate camps and each side challenged the other. But it was the means of spreading the irregularity of Nat Cockspur’s matrimonial life to all and sundry, keeping the ugly fact alive to the detriment of the moral status of the innkeeper and his now lawful spouse.

“Those dratted brats of yours, with their filthy little mouths, fouling their own home,” she told Cockspur bitterly, “can’t ye stop ’em?”

In her rough way Betsy was a law-abiding woman, Nat her one and only weakness. For him she had sacrificed her good name, that intangible halo of a righteous sentimental headpiece, in the aroma of a Thames-side ale house. The knowledge of her virtue had sustaining properties. Fortified by it she carried herself with assurance, even when immersed in the swilling out of dirty mugs and pots.

But from the moment Nat Cockspur sauntered into her place of livelihood, and accepted from her capably shaped hand a brimming pot of beer, she crumpled up

before his dominance as a newspaper in the hands of the scavenger.

Betsy Smallpiece knew her master. The luck of the ages met her over the bar-counter and wise in her generation she seized it.

In his easy-going perception of life, Nat Cockspur understood the meaning of that evening's meeting. No manoeuvring for position was needed. He wanted her; she was willing to sit down and let him walk over her if he was so minded.

But his ambitions for her ran in other directions. All that lay in his power to give would not be sufficient to prove his admiration; quite simply he was assured of his unworthiness to possess so many admirable

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qualities contained in the person of Miss Betsy Smallpiece. Yet the crowning ambition of a dearly-loved woman he could not bestow. The magic circlet of a lawfully-wedded wife was round the finger of that pale squat mooning in the squalid parlour of The Irishman's Castle.

"I'm married ye know, Betsy," he told her. "I'll not deceive ye."

"Bad luck fur me, Nat," she replied, "but my love for ye is bigger than the church, and we've only got one life to live. We'd be darned fools to let our joy slip by."

In their own way they were happy. By all moral laws this was reprehensible, but the smarts of an illicit connection were smoothed over and made innocuous by the healing power of an affection which never

failed either. There was no “money” in it! Times there were when Betsy scarcely knew where to turn for a sixpence to buy bread. Other moments, more bitter, when she learned of another babe in the (forbidden to her) inn at Hampstead. Wholly engrossed in her love for “her man” she could not understand his polygamous tendencies. How he could go from her to that other woman, confessed ill-equipped to make a comfortable home for a man or her children! Wise in the ordinary events of her sex-life, she was blind to the vagaries of propinquity, of use, above all to the insistent maternal cravings of a feeble-minded woman, inclined at all times to the masculinity in a man, whether her husband or another.

Moreover, Nat Cockspur saw no easy way out of his matrimonial difficulties. It was easiest for him to “get along”—so he got.

The legalizing of the tie between himself and Betsy Smallpiece eased all his scruples. She was his wife; he had nothing more to ask of Fate. The anomalous

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position of the Smallpiece children roused no regrets. They were there and, supposedly, would remain until they turned out to get a living. He had to work hard to fill their empty little stomachs, and Betsy proved herself the capable helpmate her “oneness” with him made imperative.

Fourteen unruly children, always on the defensive against restriction, and occupied in the affairs of their childhood’s world, were an increasingly difficult problem. The stick and the slipper, right willingly

wielded, were the daily exponents of discipline as understood by the innkeeper and his wife. The children accepted the evils of the system—all too catholically applied to be of lasting benefit—because inescapable; but the first law in their protective code was: “Don’t be found out, and if you are, run!” Running away from punishment had its value; sometimes the offence was forgotten in the pressure of efforts to earn the family livelihood. The culprits banked on that. A successful avoidance of reprisals against disobedience induced an atmosphere of strategic success very flattering to the wiliness of the delinquents.

One restriction enjoined by their common father was resented, deeply so, and unceasingly discussed and tacitly disregarded.

Stone-throwing at any time or at any place was forbidden. Now to forbid boys to throw stones is about as useful as to expect them to refrain from food. One of the principal occupations of unoccupied youth is to “shy” something at “something.” The nature of the missile is of little importance; a muttered incantation generally accompanies the “shy”—an incantation peculiarly personal to the “shyer.”

When half a dozen little Cockspurs or Smallpieces commenced this “shying” exercise—it would

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misname it to label it “amusement”—it was so seriously pursued that the results were more or less effective.

The most satisfactory object to shy at is a glass window. Doors, shutters or chimneys afford poor sport.



Cats are not so bad, though disappointing; they so seldom present an unyielding surface to a blow.

By degrees—unwelcome in their infrequency—opportunities for gymnastic displays grew steadily less, owing to the awareness of the neighbours and the large stable and garden staff at Belit Place, whose suspicions never slumbered.

The taboo which irked their restless minds was the one placed on the giant dog from Belit Place. He was a continual annoyance to a group whose massed minds hovered round rudderless activities.

Day after day that epitome of protection riled their more liberal ideas. Why should he be free to pass their stronghold unchallenged? Why should he, decorated with that aggressively spiked collar, amble or slouch, or trot over a highway, open to all, yet tacitly sacrosanct to visitors to The Irishman's Castle? Their restricted vocabulary (incidental to uninstructed ignorance) whereby they expressed themselves, prevented those individuals, supposedly in authority, from suspecting the hidden hatred simmering mischievously beneath those shock-headed pates.

This horde of bare-legged urchins, their sex differentiated only by tattered skirts or ragged little breeches, besieged with sly caution, the stable entrance to Belit Place. In and out of the bushes they peeped, along the hedgerow fencing-in the fields behind the purlieu of The Irishman's Castle and the lofty redbrick wall of the Place's kitchen-garden. Always on mischief bent, their concerted plan of attack was as

unstable as their misdirected minds; this was understood by the canine host in the stable-yard, which regarded their flitting activities as the methods of tiresome mosquitoes.

Dlugoss, from his lofty attitude of disdain for the quirks of those feeble creatures, took liberties with their opportunities. Time and again, when awaiting his mistress's visits to the loose-boxes, he sauntered to the open great gates, planting his massive dog-form in the centre, surveying with the contempt of the travelled, over the wide lands and uninhabited spaces, the country pastimes of Hampstead village.

The target thus flaunted before their disgruntled gaze grew at last into an unbearable temptation. Three of the older boys vied with each other in an attempted trouncing of the foreign dog. A broken bottle and a score of sharp flints were aimed with an accuracy measured by hate-engendered energy at Dlugoss one afternoon in March. An eventful day in March—one of its so-called “lion days”—with scurrying flocks of black clouds driven by rising tempest across the heath Londonwards.

David Scrymgeour, on a renewed sick-leave from Eton, was reading in the library, and Lycanthia with Dlugoss, had gone to the stables to take out a horse for a short canter over the heath. Just as she mounted the unruly crew in the lane let fly the bottle and the flints at the waiting dog.

The spiked end of the bottle embedded itself in his left eye, and as the wounded hound sprang in the air with the sudden agony of his injury, the bottle dropped

to the ground; a little bleeding blob adhering to the spike—the tom-out eye of the stricken dog.

Lycanthia was not alone in “seeing red.” Every man in the yard joined in the storm of indignation against the cruelly mischievous children. As the men

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ran out of the yard, the crowd scattered along the least lines of resistance, but some short cuts led to skunk-holes and to the capture of the culprits.

Nat Cockspur was not loath to administer the well-earned chastisement on the persons of his offspring. He was impartial as to sex, arguing mere presence was a guarantee of guilt. Those handled first were the biggest and to them was meted out the modicum of severity, probably because Nathaniel was fresh at his job, his rage at its height.

Lycanthia’s first thought was for her dog. Taken into the house Maga showed her resourcefulness in attending to his wounds, for he was cut about from the impacting flints. The veterinary surgeon confirmed their fears that Dlugoss was permanently blind in the left eye, and if inflammation increased, the mischief might spread to the right eye.

The short winter afternoon had closed in before Lycanthia found her way to The Irishman’s Castle to interview the landlord.

Nat Cockspur and his wife met her on the threshold.

“There’s naught I can say, miss, to ease the tragedy. I’ve welted those young devils right proper. Please to come and see them.”

Accepting the invitation, Lycanthia admitted to her raging self the landlord had not spared the rod of correction, as applied to his progeny. The chastised ones were grouped in the old railway carriage nearest the back door. Bereft of breeches, the welted backsides of the male offenders bore bleeding testimony to their father's belt. The two females, unaccustomed to tight-fitting undergarments, had presented no difficulties to their father's well-directed attentions, but as they had fared last in the group, and his muscles were a-weary, their punishment, while fitting the crime, had been merciful.

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"Six be Cockspurs, miss," said Betsy, introducing the waiting crowd to the young lady from Belit Place, "and four be me own. The two girls are me eldest. Full o' mischief as you may think; the eldest of the lot not yet fourteen."

"And how many altogether?" Lycanthia's inquiries were from a different mental angle to Betsy's line of thought.

"Fourteen, miss——" she hesitated. "You see, miss, I lived down at Greenwich and the first Mrs. Cockspur up here."

Lycanthia gave no attention to the explanation; its import did not touch her. Her emotions centred on her blinded dog and on the atrocious crew who had perpetrated such cruelty on the creature she loved best, after Maga, her nurse.

Intensive punishment they had received; stripes which would agonize for days, but recovery was

certain. Blind rage paralyzed her power of speech. She looked at the dirty boys and girls, ragged and unkempt, lying on the grime-encrusted floor of the old coach, or stretched across the plank beds used by them at night.

The smell of unwashed bodies pervaded the coach. Outside, rain splashed against the narrow windows, a blast of wind soughed through the trees bordering the inn yard.

It was an ugly scene. Dirt and pain and poverty grouped together over cruel little minds, encased in lacerated little bodies.

Lycanthia turned away. Betsy followed her; they re-entered the inn.

"I be very sorry about this, miss," the woman's voice was sincerely anxious. The aloof silence of the much-respected Miss Mortimer-Beltane's niece perturbed Betsy by its suggestion of latent ferocity. She

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followed Lycanthia on to the first step of the inn, volubly protesting her regret.

"Be there anything else you'd like me to do, miss?" she questioned. "Those children have been well punished by Cockspur, and 'is 'and ain't light. Though," she supplemented hurriedly, "'e's never laid it on me. You've only to speak, you know."

Lycanthia turned her face to the questioning woman. All her grief for her injured dog and her resentment against the perpetrators of so much cruelty, blazed forth from her eyes. And something else—some

emotion, affrighting in intensity which pierced through Betsy's stolidity, leaving her breathless.

"I hope I never see any of those beastly children again," she said and passed out into the wind and rain. Betsy stood for a moment, the in-driving moisture damping her frilled cap.

"I'd rather have young miss for a friend than an enemy," she murmured deprecatingly. "But there, a bit of cruelty like that's 'nough to rile even a saint, and she don't look like one at no time."

“People who are thoroughly bent on anything are almost always well served by chance.”

BALZAC.

“Tattered flank and sunken eye, open mouth and red.  
Locked and lank and lone they lie, the dead upon their dead.  
Here’s the end of every trail.”

KIPLING.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE HOLOCAUST OF THE CHILDREN

A SOUTH-WESTERLY gale raged over Hampstead that night. The full moon showed valiantly between piled-up masses of driven clouds, its brilliance clean washed after the pouring rain-bursts.

Lycanthia went early to bed, leaving Miss Julia and David playing Lotto in the drawing-room. The wanton injury to her dog was an emotional upset, surprising to her aunt in its intensity. She went into the dining-room as usual for dinner, swaying in her walk and subsiding into her chair as though bereft of further volition. Nor did she eat; there she made no pretence.

“I feel too sick, auntie,” she said. “I can’t forget that eye of Dlugoss sticking on the glass splinter. If he goes blind, what shall I do? He, who loves to gallop beside me when I ride! How can I give him sufficient exercise?” Miserably she stared at the polished mahogany dinner table, resplendent with its snow-white napery, crystal tumblers and decanters and well-cleaned silver. All this brilliance accentuated the darkness of her beloved hounds’ future, shut away from the light of day or the more gentle radiance of a star-lit night through the unreasoning cruelty of a childish rabble.

“Rotten luck, I call it,” said David. “They’d not even the excuse of the dog ever going for them. First time I saw Dlugoss I thought, ‘Lor! What a formidable



brute! ' By degrees I found how intelligent he is; something extraordinary even for a dog."

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Lycanthia looked moodily at her cousin, watching his lips as each word slipped out.

"He is more than a dog. He understands everything; knows the meaning of everything. He was trained in the forest; he can track, not only by scent but by all the signs used by foresters and woodmen. He has gone with my father to the hunting of wolves and wild boars and brought down the fiercest. If my father had taken Dlugoss on that last rounding-up of boars in the Droskie Forest, he would not have been gored."

Her eyes dropped to the empty plate; she wilted as she sat; the storm of her fierce anger sweeping vitality away in the maelstrom of her regrets.

"To-morrow I will go to The Irishman's Castle and interview Cockspur about those children. Smith says they are a daily nuisance, always hanging about the stable-yard gates."

Miss Julia's knowledge of the tragic occurrence that afternoon was hearsay only. She had not gone to the yard. Later, after the veterinary surgeon had finished his work of extracting glass splinters from the hound's paws and shoulders and bandaging his eyes, she had gone up to see the patient dog lying quietly in Maga's room.

The Polish woman's indignation was inarticulate in the English language. She stood, looking from Miss Julia to Dlugoss, pointing to the various cuts, to his bandaged paws and his shrouded eye-sockets; fierce

animal cries emphasized her grief as she spoke to her young mistress in their common language.

Lycanthia translated the meaning of this frenzied outburst.

“She says, auntie, that she wished to go home, go back to Poland; that this silent country is killing her, that its pretended propriety conceals the cruelty of its people.”

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Maga condensed her cries, fondling the dog, then raising her hands above her head and hurling an anathema of words into the void.

“She is over-excited. If what I have heard of Poland is true, cruelty is more rampant there than here. She is homesick. Why not send her back to her own village—to her own people, Lycanthia?”

The girl looked at her aunt; a questioning gaze containing an infathomable meaning which puzzled Miss Julia.

“Do you not know me now?” her voice implied the hurt to her affections.

“We are trying to make you happy.”

Lycanthia understood; the shock of that afternoon’s dire doings had softened her youthful hardness.

“Maga has been with me all my life; I cannot spare her—nor she me. She knows that. She would not go back to Poland without me: she wants me to go back as she says we are out of our world here.”

“That may be—to a certain extent,” Miss Julia admitted. “But, my dear child, you cannot go back to live among her people in a Polish village.”

“They are my people, too.”

Miss Julia blushed.

“Not in the same way as your father’s and your mother’s.”

“The only difference is, my grandfather omitted to have a priest mumble a few words over himself and the women he fancied.”

Miss Julia gazed horror-stricken at her niece.

“I pray you not to belittle the sin of adultery,” she said. “Your grandfather was a married man!”

“That is not Maga’s fault.”

“Possibly not, but certainly her misfortune. Oh, my dear Lycanthia, how can I show you the rights and wrongs of these lives?”

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Her distress was obvious, but it did not touch the girl; rather was she repelled. To her warped mind the moral scruples of her aunt threatened the liberties of her secret life; a living, active volcano concealed beneath the conventional training of a semi-civilized race—and something more. The blasting knowledge of the secret cult of age-old mysteries, imparted by the initiated to the neophytes with the vicious joy of ingrained evil, weaving and wafting its tendrils of sin through every provocative aim in the monotony of untutored peasant lives. It provided an excitement so intense that all ordinary human interests ceased; a gulf opened between the initiated and the ignorant, suggesting power to those who dared to “inquire” and the promise of ascendancy over those who shrank back, behind the fancied safety of bell and book—the

reassuring potency of the rosary—the promised shelter of the Cross.

Of these twilight fancies of her niece Miss Julia was ignorant. How great a part Maga had in their inception, their growth and, above all, their activity, she did not know, nor ever learned.

The protective instinct of a Christian belief warned her there was danger in the connection between mistress and maid. Eyes trained to discern the Light from the Cross did not see the mud flowing sluggishly against its foundations. The reek of its iniquity was lost in the spiritual aroma of sacrifice. Herein lay the difference in knowledge between the woman and the girl, giving the youth of innocence to the one, the ageing of corrupting practice to the other.

Lycanthia listened dully to her aunt's morally trite remarks. The centre of her life pivoted in those four rooms on the top landing in Befit Place. Outside their circumference she had no interests.

Something of this impinged upon Miss Julia's

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understanding. She was not wanted: she stood outside the sympathies of those three forming the little group. She bent down and patted the injured dog.

“Poor Dlugoss,” she murmured kindly. He was responsive to her touch of sympathy; he felt its sincerity. He wagged his heavy tail; its hard taps on the boards signified gratitude. For a moment she looked at him. Poor blind hound! Sensing her nearness he wagged his tail again; tears filled her eyes; turning away she walked slowly down the uncarpeted stairs,

but those thudding sounds from the heavy tail flooded her heart with warmth and she felt comforted.

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Later in the evening, when alone with David, she made a few comments of her dislike of her niece's Polish maid.

"Can't bear the woman," he said bluntly. "She looks like a creeping saint who has lost her way. She only looks you in the face when she wants to think something nasty of you. Vicious kind of eyes; always spying. What a pity she can't be sent back to Poland."

Miss Julia sighed acquiescently.

"Lycanthia is devoted to her; she won't hear of parting."

David grunted. Various ideas circled round his opinions of Lycanthia. She puzzled him; they were young together, but their tally of the years provided no open sesame for the dreams of youth.

If Miss Julia was his senior, claiming and receiving the respect due to her sex and generation, he felt more at ease with her. Lycanthia maintained a steady repulsion against his clumsy attempts at friendship. She accepted him as part of the uncongenial

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atmosphere of Belit Place, but had no use for him as a confidant.

"I expect, cousin Julia, it is the mixture of races which makes Lycanthia seem odd to us. She may inherit more from her father. What kind of fellow was he?"

Miss Julia had no desire to discuss the persistent lover of her youth, the man who in a fit of pique had wooed and wedded her sister. She surmised David was not in ignorance as to an episode, which to him, might spell "romance."

"Time for you to be in bed," she told him, rising from the card-table. "Your doctor was most insistent on plenty of rest."

"Is it doing me any good?" he asked despondently.

"Of course it is. You will be going back to Eton after Easter. This is the term when there is the most sickness. You must not be discouraged, David, just because you have to nurse a lung." As they left the drawing-room a heavy blast of wind struck against the house, then passing over the creaking trees, whistled weirdly as it blew across the heath to the village below.

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At two o'clock the rain ceased; the heavy clouds broke away into piled-up masses, black and threatening, their edges flecked with silver when caught by the light from the moon. Serenely she blazed in the vastness of the firmament, then scurrying clouds veiled her majesty. The heath grew dark.

A long, lithe body moved rapidly along the rutted road. Gaining the closed gate of the inn yard, it vaulted easily over, alighting on the stable rubbish-heap. Creeping silently to the door of the first old

railway-coach it waited until a heavy blast of wind shook the trees, then leaning its powerful shoulder

against the thin boards, it pressed and pressed. The door fell in, followed by the screaming wind. The animal sprang at the sleeping children, huddled together on the long, wooden bench. Mad fury possessed the ravening animal. It sprang and it savaged, tearing the yielding bodies of the half-stupefied children with the ferocity of the killer. A sudden lull in the storm carried the cries of the victims to the window of Cockspur's bedroom. He sprang out of bed, seizing his antiquated shot-gun, which was always at hand for use in case of burglars. The horrid noise from the yard convinced his half-awakened alarm that dangerous mischief was afoot among the children.

He fired his gun over the top of the coach; the sound was heard by his neighbours at The Spaniard's Inn.

He waited, then re-loaded. The clouds cleared between the moon and his insignificant little inn yard. Quite distinctly he saw an enormous animal of the dog species slink out of the shadows near the old coach and with a bound, vault over the gate. He fired again, but in the gloom his aim was too low; he cursed his own stupidity. Strange affrighting sounds came from the yard. He ran down the stairs and out—followed by Betsy. The clouds had amalgamated and the rain recommenced. The cries from the coach were fainter; the wind blew the candles out. Back into the inn for a storm-lantern Nat hurried, Betsy awaiting him by the back door.

The shambles in the coach revealed by the inadequate light from the lantern sent Betsy into the

first faint of her life. Nathaniel Cockspur was not, as he described himself, “squeamish”; many years spent along the river Thames, in and out of its squalid courts and yards, its water-side nooks and semi-hidden plague

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spots, had hardened sensibilities never acute. Even his hardihood blanched before the mangled bodies of his children. Holding the dim light above his head, he looked around.

“My God!” he breathed hoarsely, “what devil’s work is this?” Turning to shout for help, he stumbled over his wife’s inert body across the doorstep. Placing the lantern on the ground he lifted and carried her into the house, then banged on the door of the potman’s room.

“Dick, get up!” he shouted. “Get out the pony and go for the doctor.”

Half awake, wholly bewildered, the man hastened to do the landlord’s bidding, but before medical help arrived Cockspur knew nothing could avail to undo the ghastly work in the old coach.

“Get the police here before you touch——” the doctor hesitated to describe the flung-about mass of what once had been eight of the landlord’s children.

“Same dog, probably, as done in the horses at Belit Place,” was the policeman’s opinion when he arrived in the yard. But the distracted superintendent went more carefully into details. He was a Leicestershire man, lately promoted and anxious to prove his worth.



“You say you never heard a sound until just at the last? Why, eight children couldn’t be murdered in five minutes!”

“Excuse me, superintendent,” interrupted the potman, “my father’s a farmer and last Easter he had thirty ewes and lambs savaged by a big Newfoundland dog in less than thirty minutes. Have you ever seen a sheep-killer at work? Well, I have, and ’tis wonderful how quick one can be.”

“Still, eight children, and two over twelve, the landlord says, big enough to raise an alarm.”

“Not if the dog went for them first. In the dark,

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too; the first was probably lollid before he was awake.” The doctor had made his own examination, but still awaited the police surgeon to confirm it.

“Was the door open?”

“Not last night with the storm bad enough to blow a house down.”

“You say, Mr. Landlord, you saw the dog?”

“I did. A great, big fellow, shaggy-coated and powerful too; by the way, he went over the yard gate.”

“Sounds might be that Polish dog at Belit Place,” ventured the potman.

The superintendent took him up sharply.

“A similar dog in the neighbourhood?” This question he addressed to Cockspur.

“There is a big dog there—half wolf, but somehow I don’t think ’twas he. Seemed bigger—a longer head.”

The police officer shot his pencil into its holder with a bang.

“A half-wolf dog? The very kind to do a job like this! No dog with a strain of wolf in him is safe. There’s no need for me to stop here longer. I’ll get along to Belit Place and see what is to be learnt there.” The front door was the superintendent’s objective until Cockspur persuaded him he might wait some time there for admittance at six o’clock on a winter’s morning. He went through the stables, making his mission known as he went. Smith saw him first, but having slept soundly through the storm, knew nothing of the tragedy at the inn. As soon as he understood why the police invaded his stable-yard, he ran round to each loose-box and stall, inspecting each occupant with anxiety, but found all in perfect condition.

“That murdering brute ‘asn’t bin ‘ere, sergeant,” he said. “You gave me a fright, I can tell you.”

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“Nothing to the state I left behind at the inn. We’ll have to track that murderous brute—he’s dangerous. Now what about that dog your lady keeps in the house?”

“Miss Lycanthia’s Polish dog? It can’t be ‘im; ‘e was hurt something cruel by them same poor children only yesterday. They blinded ‘im with half a broken bottle.”

“Still, I must see him. There’s no other big dog in this neighbourhood anything like what Cockspur describes.”

Smith piloted the superintendent to the side entrance of Belit Place, and himself went to the butler's bedroom to prepare him for the coming interview.

"Why, it can't be Dlugoss. He's swathed in bandages. He's lost so much blood he's too weak to kill eight children," cried the butler. "When first that dog came, I feared for the whole household, but he's a right good creature. Mind you, I'm not saying he couldn't be narsty if 'e felt like it, but I've never seen nothing."

The superintendent had few questions to ask. He demanded to see the dog. The three men went upstairs treading lightly, under urgent instructions from the policeman, as he wished to see the dog before its owners had time to effect concealment.

Nothing could have proclaimed innocence more surely than Dlugoss, who was stretched out across the landing between the four rooms, with his bandaged head laid on his bandaged fore-paws.

The superintendent looked warily at him. If this dog was the culprit he would be formidable, even in his wounded state.

"Best get the vet. to look at the bandages," he said; "he'll know if they are the same as he put on. If so, the killer can't be this dog."

David, clothed in trousers and overcoat, joined the group on the landing. The footman had been his informant as to the catastrophe at The Irishman's Castle.

He blundered into the investigation.

“You don’t think it was this dog?”

The police officer evaded a direct reply.

“This young gentleman is Miss Mortimer-Beltane’s cousin, and staying in the house,” volunteered the butler.

The police officer vouchsafed to unbend.

“The landlord at the inn says he distinctly saw a big dog clambering over the yard gate. His description might fit the Polish hound. Being dark it was difficult to see what the brute was, but the landlord is positive it was a dog.”

David went up to Dlugoss.

“Poor old man,” he said, patting the head bandages. Then bending down, he put his hand over the dog’s mouth; he looked at it, then held it out to the police officer.

“There’s no blood on that.”

Emboldened by the passivity of the huge animal, the Superintendent moved nearer. Then Maga’s bedroom door opened and she came out.

“What is?” she queried of David, looking defensively at the group of men.

The Superintendent explained.

David interposed:

“She is Polish and can’t understand what you say.”

“Me know; Dlugoss ’urt.” Maga’s voice rose shrilly. “Evil persons stone ’im.”

Again David enlightened the police officer of the mischief wrought by the unruly little children the preceding day.

“She thinks you have come about that,” he said;

“she was dreadfully upset about it. She hasn’t heard about this other awful thing.”

“First I heard of the children stoning the dog was from Mr. Smith as we came through the yard. No complaint was lodged with us.”

“Miss Mortimer-Beltane didn’t wish it. Miss Lycanthia, the young lady who owns the dog, saw Cockspur, and ‘e promised to punish the young larrikins accordingly.”

“Then I suppose the stoning of the dog and the savaging of the children have nothing to do with each other. Just a coincidence.”

“Seems so. Anyways, you can see for yourself this dog can’t ‘ave bin the one.”

During the conversation Maga had sunk on her knees beside Dlugoss, fondling his bandaged head. She looked up angrily.

“Go ’way,” she muttered; “‘sturb Lycanthia.” David caught her meaning, gesticulating to attract her attention.

“Where is Miss Lycanthia?”

Maga understood; she pointed to the closed door opposite to her own.

“Sleep—very tired—sad”—pointing to the dog, who now got clumsily to his feet—“she weep for ’im.”

The Superintendent watched the animal’s slow movements.

“Don’t look capable of murdering children,” he said; “must look farther afield. But I’ll ask the vet. to report on those bandages.”

David went to the stable-yard with the Superintendent to learn all details of the frightful happenings at The Irishman's Castle, but refused the hinted invitation to take a look at the murdered children.

"I will tell my cousin about this dreadful affair," he said; "she is not yet aware of it. I suppose the

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coachman told you Miss Mortimer-Beltane's horses were killed by a strange dog some months ago. It may be the same one."

"Almost sure to be, sir. But there's no dog answering to the description anywhere in this neighbourhood. The police were notified when that happened, and we spared no trouble to get on its tracks."

David met Miss Julia in the dining-room at breakfast. She was too perturbed to eat anything. The killing of her horses had, at the time, been sufficiently disturbing, but the wholesale slaughtering of eight children (their violent deaths could scarcely be described as "murder"), was a different matter, horrifying and unnerving.

"I feel as though it had happened on my own grounds," she confided to him—"as though it was part of my own misfortune. Yet I did not know the children; I may have noticed them when riding or driving past their father's tavern. There was always a rabble of dirty children playing about the yard gate. Smith came in to tell me about it; he found the children a nuisance up and down the lane, but he has never

encouraged stranger dogs. Of course, the man is so upset he hardly knows what he does say. Mrs. Cockspur no sooner comes out of one faint than she goes into another; it was unfortunate she saw those poor children.”

“I don’t quite see how that could be helped. Cockspur woke her up when he heard the cries. They might come from some child with colic; who was to know what had happened until they saw—what there was to see?”

“I suppose not.”

“Where’s Lycanthia? Bad head again?” David suddenly noticed his young cousin was absent.

Miss Julia looked round the table. Shock at the

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dreadful news from the tavern had engrossed her to the exclusion of mundane events.

“I do not know.” She suddenly felt helpless, unable to cope with the confusion of that morning’s horrors. “I expect she is still upset about poor Dlugoss, but Maga has not sent me a message.”

“She’s all right; I saw her up on the landing with the dog. She heard the Superintendent of Police talking to Smith, and came out of her room. She’s a disagreeable creature! Seemed to think none of us had a right to be there, and kept muttering angrily to herself.”

“She will certainly know how Lycanthia is. I do not like her, but she is devoted to my niece, jealous of any outside influence and always watchful as though she feared it.”

“She can’t expect to keep Lycanthia in swaddling-clothes.”

Miss Julia rose from the table.

“I have sent a note down to my cousin, Westhaughton. The Lords are sitting, so he will be at Berkeley Square. I must talk matters over with him.”

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Lord Westhaughton responded to his cousin’s letter as promptly as his chestnuts could negotiate the distance between Berkeley Square and Belit Place.

“Well, well, Julia,” he said cheerfully, undoing his neck scarf before removing his heavy coat, but walking directly into the Chinese Room, where she was awaiting him. “What’s all this dreadful affair got to do with you?” As he asked the question he threw his scarf on to a chair, trying to shake off his overcoat on to another, while the butler was unsuccessfully endeavouring to secure both.

“Eight children killed, you say, by a dog! Whose

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dog? What dog? Not that formidable-looking hound Lycanthia Kritzulesco brought from Poland?”

“No! no! No one suspects him. The police have been already making inquiries. But I felt I must see you and have your advice.”

“Which, as always, is at your service.”

Seating himself near the blazing log fire, he saw David standing in the background.

“Hallo! Isn’t that young Scrymgeour?” he asked.  
“Name, David, I think.”



David moved forward.

“Yes, sir, it’s David.”

“How are you, eh? Shot with your father just before Christmas, and heard you were here on sick-leave from Eton. How’s the lung?”

“Better, sir.”

“And your father’s gout?”

“Had not heard he had any.”

“By gad, he had, though! Night before I left it got him in his big toe.”

“Mother never mentioned it in her letters.”

“Passed off, then. Good riddance! Tell me, young David, what do you make of all this? First those fine barouche horses savaged by a strange dog; now these eight children done in. Most mysterious, I call it.”

“I don’t know what to think, sir, but it certainly is not Lycanthia’s dog.”

“Oh, by the way”—turning to Miss Julia—“where is Lycanthia?”

“Upstairs in her bedroom. She is subject to severe headaches.”

“A young girl’s megrims,” he responded unfeelingly. “Get her married, Julia. She gave me the impression of being stronger than many horses—not only the proverbial one.”

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Miss Julia blushed.

He laughed.

“You always were too correct; too much afraid of recognizing the rights of human nature.” Then he grew grave. “Don’t let her make your mistake and pass by

possible happiness because the opportunity lacks perfection.”

Miss Julia stiffened. Not with offence. A vague premonition rippled across the surface of her mind. The past was rich in recollections; what did the future hold? Aridly it stretched before her, still unsown with the spring or winter com of abundance. With a shock she realized no woman can harvest alone—to the man the giving forth, to the woman the gathering in. The immutable law of God.

She looked at her cousin. An eternity of comprehension, compressed within the womb of time, separated his careless speech of ten seconds from what she was never to forget.

David slipped out of the room. The serious trend of the conversation embarrassed him. Neither noticed his going.

Miss Julia's hands trembled.

“Lycanthia does not seem attracted to men.” She made the observation to defend herself as her niece's cicerone.

“That will come. Next season Constance will take her about a bit, unless you will come out of your shell and do it yourself.”

“She is only seventeen. Constance will present her at the first Drawing-Room, and then she can go everywhere.”

“Well, now, about this nasty business! If Lycanthia's hound is guiltless it is none of your affair. Cockspur struck me as a man well able to keep his end up when I saw him in your stable-yard last

Christmas. The police are attending to his affairs, so I suggest you take Lycanthia and get off to Brighton for ten days and forget about all this.”

The butler came into the room.

“Sergeant Jarvis wishes to see you, Miss Julia.”

For a moment Miss Mortimer-Beltane hesitated.

Her cousin got up.

“Best see him and get it over,” he advised.

The sergeant came smartly in.

“I thought you might like to know I’ve had Mr. Brenton, the vet., round to look at the Polish hound, and he says the bandages are the ones he put on the dog, so he is not the one we are looking for.”

“I never thought he was. He looks savage, but has been amiable with everyone.”

“One other thing, miss. One of my men tells me the postern door in the garden wall opening on to the heath was open at daylight this morning. Your gardener tells me it is always barred from the inside at night. The butler and housekeeper have questioned all the servants, but no one will admit using that door last night.” He waited, obviously expecting an answer.

“Certainly I did not use it.” Miss Julia spoke slowly. “My niece, Miss Lycanthia, went early to bed with a severe headache, and is still in her room.

“As a matter of routine, I would like the young lady questioned. The open door may mean nothing, but as it’s a bit unusual, and as we are on an unusual case, a question might mean a saving of time.”

“Do you wish to question the young lady, or will her answer through Miss Mortimer-Beltane be sufficient?”

The police officer knew Lord Westhaughton; he turned quickly to him.

“Just an answer through the lady will do, me lord; it’s just a formality.”

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Miss Julia left the room.

Lord Westhaughton continued his questions.

“Have you questioned Mr. Scrymgeour, the young gentleman staying here?”

“Yes—first go off. I’ve had him round at my office several times lodging complaints against those same children. Stone-throwing at the Polish dog At first I thought this killing affair might be revenge; some animals can be revengeful, but it’s certainly not that.”

Miss Julia returned.

“No, sergeant, the door was not left open by my niece. She has been with her nurse all night. She generally goes up to her if she has one of her neuralgic headaches.”

“I forgot that nurse,” said the sergeant slowly; “she came on the landing while I was looking at the dog. Perhaps I might step up and put the question to her?”

“With Miss Mortimer-Beltane’s permission I will go with you. The woman speaks little English, but I have a colloquial smattering of Polish and might help you.”

Maga opened her bedroom door with an alacrity suggestive of expectation. Her pale eyes flashed interrogatively. Lord Westhaughton explained the sergeant’s mission.

The woman replied angrily.

“Speak in English,” ordered Lord Westhaughton. “I ask you the question in English, as I have made it clear to you in your own language. Did you open the garden postern door in the wall last night or early this morning?” He again spoke to her in Polish.

“No,” she shouted at him, “not in that ugly storm.” Then, lapsing into her own dialect: “Does this policeman think I killed those children? If he does

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not think so, why does he come with his stupid question?”

“Evidently she knows nothing, me lord, but these questions must be asked.” He looked round the square landing.

“Let me show you where this door leads,” suggested Lord Westhaughton. He opened the one between the windows overlooking the garden. The iron stair-case faced them; the narrow steps led steeply down to the enclosed garden reserved for Dlugoss. “There,” he said, pointing to the high, ivy-covered wall, “is the postern door you are inquiring about.”

The police officer slipped out, then sideways down the narrow iron steps into the garden, followed by Lord Westhaughton. He examined the door, and its long, strong, iron bolt.

“You see, me lord, if this door was opened as my man said, it must have been opened from the inside. If the head-gardener wasn’t so positive he had bolted it last night, I should think he’d shoved the hasp carelessly against the cut-out, and then, in the storm, the door blew open.”

“Probably that is what happened.” Lord Westhaughton failed to see any connection between the open postern door and the killer of the children. Dlugoss, the user of the iron staircase and the postern door, was clear of suspicion. Why, then, trouble further about it?

“Nothing to be learnt here, sergeant, likely to be useful to you,” he commented.

“No, me lord, so it seems. It’s certainly a puzzle. I’ll have short accounts printed and sent round to the different hunts. All those within fifty or sixty miles. Those sheep-killer dogs will travel miles to get on with their work.”

They walked slowly back to the house. Another

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stout door barred their egress into the inner stable-yard. Sergeant Jarvis looked it well over.

“This one can only be opened from this side too,” he said. “This bolt is fast enough. If anyone used that postern door last night, how would they get in here?”

Lord Westhaughton pointed to a green-painted, wooden hut against the ivy-covered wall.

“That hut has two entrances. One gives on to this garden and the other into the lake garden. It is only used by the gardeners.”

“Ah! that explains it. Just at first I was a bit puzzled; it seemed as though that door at the top of the iron staircase against the wall was the only way of getting in here.”

“No, the gardener’s tool-shed has an entrance. There was another, but it was purposely closed when

the Polish hound came. This garden is reserved for him when he needs exercise.”

“A big fellow like that needs a lot. The ladies take him along when riding over the heath. He goes as fast as the horses. I’ll say good day now, me lord, and get along with those notices to the hunts.”

“Fit language  
there is none,  
For the heart’s deepest things.”

“After long weary days I stood again  
And waited at the Parting of the Ways.”

J. R. LOWELL.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE KILLER-DOG

THE holocaust of the children at The Irishman's Castle provided a sensation for Hampstead and the whole of England, of the most lurid kind.

Cockspur was positive the killer was an unusually large rough-haired dog. Cases of canine hydrophobia were common in England before 1880, and the opinion that the dog was rabid received general credence.

The police actively pursued inquiries over the whole district and county. So dangerous a beast was a menace to animals and men.

Major Carruthers, master of the South Berkshire Hunt, made a suggestion, wholly discredited by the police. He was an early visitor to The Irishman's Castle, being anxious to assure himself the maniacal killer was not one of his foxhounds. By the yard gate lay a mound of rubbish. The morning before the gale, Cockspur was tarring the inside of the gate, and inadvertently left the bucket of tar on the rubbish-heap. During the gale the wind upset it, and the killer, bounding from the scene of his bloody exploits, jumped into the sticky mess, leaving the distinct impress of his two hind feet.

Major Carruthers, examining the yard and gate, and the spilt tar, made the surprising discovery that the impressions were those of a wolf and not of a dog. Until he was satisfied his observations were correct, he

made no announcement of what was to be a most surprising deduction.

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When he did go to the police, the immediate result was, the Superintendent visited the South Berkshire Hunt Kennels, suspecting Major Carruthers of trying to conceal a possible killer among his hounds.

Voicing his suspicions to the inspector—

“It isn’t common sense to pretend such a thing,” he said, “we’ve no wolves in Hampstead, more like one of his foxhounds got rabies.”

“I doubt him keeping a killer, rabid or not. The men in the kennels would know, it’s a thing that can’t be hidden. Too dangerous in a valuable pack of hounds.”

The Superintendent was obstinate.

“There must be more behind it. Might as well say a tiger as a wolf; except in Zoos there ain’t any wolves in England.”

“Major Carruthers is a gentleman who hunts in Brittany every year with a friend who has a big estate. I’d rather take a bit of notice of his idea than not.”

“Not me. False scent altogether.”

This opinion he stuck to, listening patiently to Major Carruthers when he visited the central office to give his reasons.

The Superintendent countered his suggestion.

“It’s this way, sir, there ain’t any wolves in England. Besides, Cockspur is certain the animal was a dog.”

“The night was stormy and the man half-awake and horror-stricken; he says he has never seen a wolf and

under such circumstances he jumped to the most natural conclusions.”

“Sorry, Major, I can’t think it likely. Once get on to a false trail, I’ll never get any further.”

“Have it your own way, but the brute you are looking for is a wolf.”

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Among the members of the hunt, Major Carruthers’s opinion received more credence. A certain amount of opposition was natural considering the inherent probabilities. But he hunted regularly in Brittany with a friend resident at Quimperlé, and was more likely to know what he was talking about than the police or Cockspur.

“Everyone is liable to make mistakes,” he admitted, “but here I’m on sure ground. The police and the landlord can only talk of what they know, or think they know. It is easy in the dark to mistake a wolf for a dog.”

“There is one weak link in the chain of your supposition, Carruthers,” the speaker was Lord St. Austell, “if this mysterious and ferocious brute is a wolf, where is he now? The horrid affair has been mentioned in every newspaper of note in the kingdom. Except for one glimpse of his long body, as he went over the yard gate, no other person has seen him! Big dogs abound in England. A killer will travel for miles. Ask any farmer who has lost his sheep by one of these murderous dogs. They have been known to hunt in packs. Before we look for a highly im-probable wolf, let us search for a killer-dog. They are deuced cunning,

sly brutes, and will hide up for weeks between kills. Quite likely the same brute killed Miss Mortimer-Beltane's horses. Twice he has hunted in this neighbourhood. He'll come again."

In a few days Lord St. Austell's opinion as to the probable recurrence of a visit from the mysterious killer-dog spread through the village. Coupled with Major Carruthers's suggestion that the animal was more likely to be a wolf, the horrified inhabitants went warily about their avocations—whether in the village or on the heath, in their gardens or farmyards. No person ventured on the heath alone. The farmers

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herded cows, sheep and pigs into byres and styes by sundown. The men went around with stable forks or garden shears. Some, more venturesome, carried loaded pistols, quakingly bestowed in coat pockets. When so equipped, they were almost as afraid of their dangerous protectors as of the legendary wolf.

Miss Mortimer-Beltane—her sympathies more significantly engaged through the link of her murdered carriage horses, with the landlord's murdered children—offered a hundred pounds reward for the capture of the wanted beast. She also defrayed the cost of a suitable headstone, handsomely engraved with the names and ages of the eight little victims, over their burial mound in the churchyard.

Cockspur's affections for his long toll of boys and girls were not deep. It was difficult to spread paternal sentiment over fifteen ragged offspring, who were generally hungry and always dirty. The man was

shaken by the terrible scene in the old coach, nor could he exclude from his shrinking mental vision the recollection of it. For several weeks the landlord of The Irishman's Castle was indisputably drunk, especially at night when the flickering gas jets sent dancing shadows across the uncarpeted floor.

But a sufficiently large family remained to test his resources.

He appreciated Miss Mortimer-Beltane's sentimental interest. It added respectability to his vocation and his tavern. Moreover, the steady increase of custom, consequent on the notoriety of his bereavement, assisted in dulling its edge.

"'Tis an ill wind, Betsy me girl, which benefits none," he observed with a poor attempt to placate ill-fortune.

His wife looked at him indignantly.

"Pray to God, it's like won't blow this way twice.

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I can't a-bear to think of my two bin tore to their deaths that awful night; I can't pretend to feel the same about yours—poor innercents—even if they did blind the young lady's dog. Some devilish, four-footed creature paid 'em back proper." She caught her breath hysterically.

"Now, Betsy, pull up," he admonished, "don't begin tantrums again."

"Don't you talk to me about 'ill winds'. I suppose you're thinking of the custom we're getting and taking on those two new men in the bar. Every time I see them I think of that wind-blown night and your horrid

screech. I likes, as well as another, to hear the money dropping in the till—but this 'ere's a bit too much."

To change the subject, he hastened to remark:

"That Major Carruthers of our near-by hunt says he believes the great dog I saw was a wolf."

"A wolf!" she echoed, "well, what next?"

"The police just laugh at the idea."

"Good job some folks can laugh at it; I ain't felt like a laugh since it happened. Whatever put such an idea in his 'ead?"

"Marks of feet in the patch of tar by the gate. He says they were never made by a dog."

She considered this.

"What's the difference between a dog's feet and a wolf's?"

"I dunno; the Major seems to think 'e does. He hunts wolves in Brittany when 'e stays there with friends. He's bin to the police about it."

"Lot of good they've bin," she said contemptuously, "poking about and asking questions I'm tired of answering. Now that queer-looking Polish woman from Belit Place came along this morning—right into the yard—walking so soft no one heard her

over the cobbles by the sheds. One of the men asked her her business and she mouthed words he could make nothing of. I went out and she came ever so quickly right up and said—

"Ver' sad! All gone! Dog, big dog?"

"And I said—'Yes, big dog and spread out my hands to show her. A funny look came on her face, her

mouth went crooked, then she talked fast in her heathenish language, throwing up her hands. I said —‘Oui, oui’, like that French dancing teacher who comes in sometimes for a glass; but she didn’t understand. After a bit she went off with her black cloak blowing out like a sack behind. She walked fast, not taking the lane up to the stables, but going by the garden wall towards the village.

“Making for the door in the garden wall, I expect. She meant well; ’tis a misfortune to be in a country where you don’t know the language.”

“I don’t like ’er, she didn’t feel kind—sort of hardness about ’er. Her eyes are cunning; she came to find out something. Women don’t often deceive me—leastways those I’ve come across, and I don’t suppose Polish folks are much different to ours.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Mortimer-Beltane went to Brighton through Lord Westhaughton’s insistence.

“You must have a change, Julia, get away from the sight and sound of Hampstead and Cockspur’s tavern.”

“Lycanthia does not wish to go.”

“What’s that?” he barked shrilly, “not go! Why not?”

“Says she cannot leave Maga and the dog.”

“Trash! She must go. She’ll be getting hysterical next. I hope you let her understand your wishes are to be obeyed.”

“You do not know Lycanthia, Edward. I have little influence with her; less than you suppose. She lives under my roof; sits at my table; meets my friends; but she, the real girl, is not in my—in our lives. She has hers apart. Quite definitely so.”

He plunged his hands into his pockets.

“It’s damned funny. All our family are quite ordinary folks, yet this girl—for that is what she is—is something apart. She’s not English.”

“How can she be? Her father was part Polish and part Austrian.”

“Cross-bred, eh? Well, first cross is generally all right; it’s the ‘afterwards’ who throw out oddments.” He considered his own deductions. “Am I to understand the matter of going with you to Brighton is not settled.?”

“Not by any means. I think she intends to have her own way.”

He got up from his seat.

“Have I your permission to send for her? Where is she likely to be?”

“Upstairs, either in her own room or with her nurse.”

Lycanthia answered her cousin’s summons, coming into the room non-committally determined to reject all proposals for visiting Brighton.

“Lycanthia,” he began at once, “I hear you do not wish to go to Brighton.”

She looked at him, an intense, considering look, taking the measure of his pressure against her resistance.



“That is true. I do not wish to leave my nurse; she is lonely when I am absent.”

“For God’s sake send her back to Poland. She can’t speak English, she makes no friends; she must be miserable. It is time you accustomed yourself to

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do without a nurse, no matter her length of service.” His irritation increased, “When your father confided you to your aunt’s care he did not intend you should pass your life with your personal servant.”

To his astonishment she laughed.

“How do you know what my father intended?”

“Eh! What? “His bewilderment bereft him of speech.

“My father did not give you his confidence.” Her voice was steady. “He was a very clever man.”

For a moment she left the deduction of her assertion to him.

“Lycanthia, I ask you to remember we are really your friends endeavouring to advise you.”

She looked quickly at Miss Julia.

“It would not be the action of friends to separate me from Maga. If I sent her away she would die. I am her all, and I—I could not be happy away from her.”

“You can’t go through life tied to the apron-strings of a nurse.”

He imagined she twisted her neck as she turned to look at him; the impression was momentary, but disagreeable.

“Why not?”

“Why not?” he repeated. “Well, because it simply is not done.”

Again she laughed. A cold shiver ran down his back. He was a very honest Englishman with little practical knowledge of the dark comers of a woman’s mind. He regarded Lycanthia as a girl—an unfledged female member of his large family of cousins. An orphan member, one to be advised, guarded and protected. Slowly the idea penetrated his questioning understanding. This young orphan cousin was flouting him—very decidedly so. As he saw the position,

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greatly to her own detriment. This personal subservience to an ignorant Polish peasant could not continue; it must be broken. His decision made, he turned to Miss Julia, seated by her bureau, ostensibly an unconcerned listener.

“I think, Julia, you and I should discuss this question. Lycanthia does not seem to understand how necessary it is for her future happiness to cast aside childish entanglements which have lost their uses.”

Lycanthia’s large mouth folded its colourless lips together in a streak across her face. Her pale eyes flickered as she replied:

“Cousin Edward, I cannot give up Maga. For me she will suffer anything; she would die if I sent her from me.”

He grumbled unintelligibly under his breath; his thoughts were decisive.

“Damned if I’d let that matter.” For a moment he hesitated. “Unfortunately I cannot tackle the woman

myself. Let her know what I think about this clinging on to her young mistress.”

“Maga can be very determined.”

“Possibly,” he retorted dryly, “but surely you must realise how great a responsibility you are to your aunt. When your father consigned you to her care he knew exactly the kind of life you would be compelled to lead. He knew England; he knew this house.”

“He knew Aunt Julia,” she interrupted.

He stared at her, not comprehending her unspoken suggestion.

She went on:

“He sent me to her as a revenge for not marrying him.”

“Good God!” he ejaculated, startled out of his dignified repose. “What an outrageous assertion!”

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“I have come too late to fit into this English life,” her voice deepened; “do you think it is easy for me?”

“No, by Gad! I don’t! But what are we to do? Your father’s will stands until you are twenty-one.

“Ah! Nearly four more years.”

“My dear Lycanthia, do be reasonable! You must help us to help you.”

“Sending Maga away cannot help me.”

“Well, we must consider what can be done about that.”

On that vague premise she left the room, turning and gliding through the doorway with a sinuous grace peculiar to herself.

“Bit of a problem,” he said to his cousin. “I am inclined to think Kritzulesco did not give sufficient consideration to his daughter’s happiness in sending her over here. Surely he had Polish or Austrian relations who would receive the girl? She is no heiress, but three hundred English pounds a year is a good fortune in Poland.”

Miss Julia made no answer. Her extreme personal diffidence towards the matrimonial complications of her early life pained her every recollection of Kritzulesco. Marriage with another woman should for ever have freed him from all thought of her. Making her innocent young sister his wife kept the burning remembrance of his passion eternally before her. The coming of Lycanthia sealed the past with the (figuratively) heraldic emblazonment of his undying determination. To that obsession he sacrificed the daughter as he had sacrificed her mother, lacerating the affections of their souls at the altar of his rejected passion. To keep himself in touch with Julia Mortimer-Beltane the two” after women” were used as pawns in his game of life. Understanding of his motives was made plain to these two. The first on her wedding

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journey, the second from the coming of her fifth birthday. It was now coming to Julia, slowly—even horribly—its implacability creating its own hideousness. For an instant her head whirled; she closed her eyes. This was a dreadful situation.

Westhaughton caught her expression. He looked at her curiously.

“Did you hear what that girl said? Something about Kritzulesco sending her to you for revenge?”

Miss Julia’s lips were dry.

“I heard,” she whispered, “but I hope, Edward, you paid no attention to such a ridiculous remark.”

“Such an idea never originated in a girl’s head—about her father.” He was silent for a moment, turning things over in his mind. “Of course,” he said, “it may be that nurse—for her own purpose.” Again he paused. “I know what I will do. There is one of the men at the Octrian Embassy whose mother is a Pole—he goes shooting with an uncle near Cracow—I’ll get into touch with him and tell him about our difficulties with the woman, Maga. He’s a nice fellow; I’ll get him to come and talk to her and see if we can’t frighten her off.”

Miss Julia rose from her chair. The pallor of her face startled him.

“Been a bit too much for you,” he said kindly, wondering if her dead brother-in-law was indeed taking his revenge in a thoroughly Slavonic way. “Try not to worry. Depend on my services to the utmost of my power. When Constance comes to town, which will be early next week, talk it all over with her. Constance is a deuced kind woman and it’s a confidante like her you need now.”

Driving back to London his thoughts veered round to the truth.

“The fellow certainly loved her. There never was

a doubt about that. But after marrying her sister—forging a link, as it was, between them—surely he might have settled down and forgiven his rejection by a woman who never encouraged his addresses. Now he carries on the game from his grave. Poor devil!”

“——there is a sixth sense, i.e. a knowledge of reality along channels other than the usual one supplied by the senses.”

“Thus we are surrounded by innumerable vibrations.”

“——the sixth sense is that mysterious sensibility which reveals to us a fragment of reality.”

PROFESSOR CHARLES RICHEL.

“Omniscience has Its own Vibration of Truth.”

F. L.-B.

## CHAPTER XVI

### COUNT FELIX PONINSKI

LORD WESTHAUGHTON went to Belit Place with his friend, Count Felix Poninski, to interview Lycanthia's maid, at a time when the ladies were in London.

Count Felix was well versed in the traditions of his country and its superstitions. He had written two widely-read treatises on "The Evil Eye,"\* and another on "Superstitions Among Polish Peasants."

These subjects not interesting Westhaughton, he had no idea of the extent of his friend's occult knowledge, nor had he perused the pamphlets which were, written in German.

When driving up to Hampstead he had discussed the unfavourable impression made by his cousin's Polish maid.

"I believe," he said, "there is a blood connection; the woman's mother is supposed to be a daughter of old Prince Jablonowski, but I do not know any particulars. She brought my young cousin up—foster-mother and that sort of thing—she lives by herself in four rooms at the top of my cousin, Miss Mortimer-Beltane's house. The curious arrangement is by her own wish, expressed through Lycanthia Kritzulesco. She speaks no English, so makes no acquaintances among the other servants. There is a big, half-bred wolf-hound—Dlugoss by name—belonging to my young cousin. He has the run of these four rooms and a



bit of walled-in garden; there is an iron staircase from the top floor to the garden. The maid uses this when she goes out, so does the dog."

"This means the woman does not trouble the household with her comings and goings."

"Quite so. Her one link with the outside world is my young cousin, who spends more time with her nurse than her aunt approves."

"Still, such a physical tie as that of foster-mother is difficult to break. There is likely to be a strong affection between them."

"That we recognize. It is the woman's personality which repels. It may be racial, or it might be something else. You, being partly Polish, as is my young cousin, should know."

If Maga was surprised at the summons to the library, she expressed none. Quietly she descended the stairs, her heelless soft slippers muffling her footsteps. One glance she threw at the gentlemen standing by the table, facing her as she came in. Then she dropped her eyes and folding her hands within her loose sleeves, signified by her humble attitude she awaited an explanation.

Lord Westhaughton spoke first.

"This, Maga, is Count Felix Poninski, whose uncle, Prince Blichowsky, lives near Cracow. He knows the district from where you come."

Whether she understood anything of the speech he could not tell. Her eyes were raised for an instant at the

sound of the visitor's name. Then she resumed her pose of waiting.

The Count spoke to her in the dialect of her own province. She started slightly, a faint wave of colour mantling her pallid face.

He continued his speech. At last she answered briefly. He addressed a series of questions which

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stirred her resentment. As she stood in the shadows, but facing the light, her slight figure, clothed in the shapeless black garment she habitually wore, was not without dignity. Her tightly coiffed head, the drapery falling behind in the likeness of a veil, left a narrow band of forehead above her secretive eyes. As the conversation proceeded, unintelligible to the Englishman, the force of her resentment slowly pervaded the room. Whatever else she might be, the woman, Maga, was no negative individual. Forcible but collected she stood, answering with increasing decisiveness the questions put to her. By degrees an embarrassing atmosphere collected between her and the two gentlemen, they almost felt ashamed at harrying this small, quiet woman, facing their curiosity with the courage of a feline saint. Almost—but not wholly! A flicker in those deep-set eyes, a curious, even snarling twist to the thin lips negated innocence.

Yet she remained mistress of the situation. Seeing in part the full import of her influence over Lycanthia Kritzulesco was not by them understood, but they sensed its fact and its destructive nature.

Count Felix turned to Lord Westhaughton.

“We need not detain the woman. I have conveyed to her the wishes of Miss Mortimer-Beltane and yourself that the young lady should be slowly weaned from her dependence—that she must be encouraged to take her part in the social gaieties of her surroundings. Be more with her aunt and accompany her in her travels. Also, I informed her if she wished to return to her native country, Miss Mortimer-Beltane would speed her on her journey; indeed, she and you were anxious she should go back to Poland, to her own people.”

“And her reply?”

“Noncommittal.”

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Lord Westhaughton looked at Maga. The whole of the foreign woman's soul appeared as projected from her eye-sockets, to be in fact, her entire range of vision; to penetrate beyond her questioners' envelopes of flesh, seeming to wring from their reserves the core of their thoughts, the truth of their seeking her.

“A longer interview will not assist,” the Count murmured, “she knows what she knows. She seeks to discover what we know. Best allow her to depart.”

If his surmise was correct, her prompt acquiescence in quitting the room did not confirm it. The closing of the door behind her shrouded figure was as stealthy as though she feared discovery.

Count Felix breathed deeply.

“With her goes the shadow of the spirit. It filled the room; were you conscious of it?”

“Conscious of what?”

“The cold evil of the woman's personality.”

“She never made me feel cold, but I always disliked her. A bit strong to call her ‘evil.’”

“If my advice is of any value to you, Westhaughton, get that woman gone. Return her to Cracow.” He stopped suddenly, obviously thinking deeply. When he spoke again his voice was not so confident. “Jesus-Marie! that it be not too late.”

“What not too late?”

“To release your young cousin from the influence of her nurse.”

“Distance will accomplish that.”

“Not necessarily. Some ties are not broken by miles. I doubt this one being so.”

“You speak in enigmas.”

Count Felix shook his head.

“Alas! my friend, you English are so practical, may I say insular-minded?”

“You mean narrow-minded?”

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“If you permit so plain a statement of fact.”

“Speak on. Help me to see daylight over this.”

“By religion I am a Catholic. Most of my countrymen and women are so, but together with the dogmas of our Church—an undercurrent as it were—runs the dark superstitions of pre-Christian days. More real to our peasants than this later worship of a God they have not seen. More comforting than the gorgeously dressed, inanimate figures of the Mother of God in our churches. Quite likely this Polish maid of your cousin is a votary of a cult you, in your insular security, would reject as fantastic.”

“I do not understand.”

“I will explain. My cousin Oscar is a priest. We were together at the University of Prague for a term. In those days he was destined for the army. Suddenly he changed his mind; he decided to enter the services of the Church. Quite literally so. To serve the ignorant and the sinful. To eschew luxury, gaiety, and all the allurements of the world. I was amazed at his resolve. One evening, when he came to visit me in Vienna, on his way to Rome from Cracow, he told me his reasons.

“His religious training—by that I mean his preparation for the priesthood—made clear to his understanding the truths of certain practices he had observed carried on by peasants on his father’s estate. For a time he actively dallied with occult investigation. At first because he had not sufficient interests, then from curiosity. By degrees he was forced into sensing something diabolic beneath what he hastily assumed to be nonsense. A man comes to such realization more surely than a woman: intrinsic evil does not attract him in the same degree. Materialistic aberrations spring into actions more rapidly with a man.

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A woman wallows into depths wherein she seeks—and sometimes finds—her master.

“I think my cousin was drawn into certain occult secrets he forbore to describe. It may be fear propelled him into the fold of Mother Church. This I suspected. He stressed the dangers of occult, psychic investigations. The Catholic hierarchy trains its priests in the knowledge of the many-sided aspects of evil.

This is not done by any Protestant denomination. He particularly denounced the societies termed ‘Spiritualistic.’ He was uncompromisingly convinced all mediumistic materializations were satanic. My dabblings in the superstitions of our peasantry inclined me to agree with his views. Undoubtedly much wickedness was perpetrated in the villages through peculiarly endowed women, termed witches. Possibly ‘suggestion’ combined with fear and credulity played a definite part, but behind was something more deadly. A ‘force’ I did not test—almost feared to test. But ‘it’ was a reality; a watchful, sleepless reality. A more lucid description I am unable to give.”

“How do these conjectures concern this Polish woman? Forgive me if I am sceptical.”

“To my unbiased, yet not wholly ignorant observation, she recalls to my memory a certain Tasha, wife of a horse doctor who lived in the village on my uncle’s estate. This Tasha was renowned as a White-Witch. The term is applied to a woman who uses occult means to a so-called ‘good’ end. There was something in the belief. Maybe she was an hypnotist. Certainly she and her opposite—a hideous old woman, known as Lydka—kept the village in a state of nervous tension. Our priest was an intelligent man. Cunning though our peasants are, he understood them. But despite his fatherly anxiety for the welfare of their souls, they circumvented him. I was the chief

repository of his fears. From him I learnt something of the dark side of human nature. His knowledge and my

own observations, correlated to my cousin's trained knowledge, showed me two facts. Firstly, there is a demoniac world closely akin to our own, yet definitely shut out from active intervention by the Mercy of God. Mediumistic seances, deliberately arranged, are the opportunities for these devilish entities to break through. Shut out by God; invited 'in' by men. The madness of ignorance: the curious groping after 'Power.'

"The true nature of these 'sittings' is in no way altered by hymns or prayers. Its inception is against the law of God; it is spiritual corruption. A few man-made hymns or prayers are no antidote against out-raging the commandment of the Almighty.

"Secondly, a certain set of persons, generally women, for definite scientific reasons, are able, under clearly defined laws of nature, to get into touch with the fringe of the satanic world. The Watchers on the Threshold, masquerading as 'guides' in spiritualistic circles cozening those sitters with the grimacing lies of hell.

"The Old Testament injunction—"Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" is applicable to a genuine materializing medium, and is correctly directed against conscious workers of evil signs and tokens. These abound in every country and in all races, be they white, black or brown.

"In my judgment this Polish maid in this house falls into the category of village witches."

"Forgive me, Poninski, if I do not follow your arguments nor understand your premises. The affairs of the House and my own estates absorb my time to

the exclusion of recondite subjects. To believe in the verity of witches or witchcraft strains my credulity.

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That sly-looking foster-mother of Lycanthia Kritzulesco may be all you surmise, but I—well, to be honest—I cannot believe it.”

“That is not surprising. In my country—in fact where there is a peasant class living in vast numbers on the land—a belief in witchcraft prevails. It is a survival of the worship of Pan. If you went carefully into research work among the country people in these islands you would find definite traces. In Lancashire, Cornwall and Essex there is an under-tow of superstition akin to those in my country.”

“Maybe, I am not an authority, but I refuse to believe that woman, Maga, is a witch; she looks too respectable.”

Count Felix laughed.

“Sobriety of appearance has nothing to do with the matter. My opinion was formed by certain other signs, not perceptible to the uninitiated.”

“To tell my cousin she is harbouring a witch in her house will not help us to break the extraordinary attachment which causes her so much concern.”

“It will give her food for thought. In itself an affection between the Countess Kritzulesco and her foster-mother is natural. But the sinister personality of the woman impressed itself upon me. She may not be an active agent. She may even be an ‘extinct’ one. But I am positive she has a fund of occult knowledge.



“Reconsidering my conversation, I think she will influence your cousin to go with Miss Mortimer-Beltane to Brighton. If my judgment of her power is correct, she will go carefully. You, she possibly does not understand. The English mentality is baffling to foreigners. She will read me like a book. From now on, she will be on her guard.”

Lord Westhaughton emitted an enormous sigh.

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The landmarks in his life suddenly obscured themselves. He floundered in a quagmire of mental upheavals, mist bemused.

“Enchanted ground, Poninski,” he growled in his embarrassment, “suppose we have a drink.”

“By all means, but before finishing our little conversation, may I advise very tactful handling of that woman? Get rid of her if you can so contrive, but it may be difficult.”

As the gentlemen stood in the porch awaiting the carriage which was to take them back to London, Count Felix asked another question.

“Does Miss Mortimer-Beltane keep poultry?”

“Poultry? Well, I really don’t know.” Turning to the butler, he asked, “Jason, does Miss Julia keep poultry?”

“No, my lord. We get our eggs from Whitsheaf Farm, just across the heath.”

“What did you want to know that for?” he asked the Count.

“Just to test my theory. Witches never keep their hands off cocks, you know.”

“Can’t say I did. If I wanted a tasty meal I should choose a cockerel.”

“Ah! but a witch wants a cock for other reasons than food.”

“Some hokey-pokey I suppose.”

“Successfully to work their spells they must make a blood sacrifice. Country witches use cocks—black for choice.”

Turning to the butler with a twinkle in his eyes, Lord Westhaughton asked—

“Any cock-killing been going on here, Jason?”

“No, my lord. None I’ve heard of, my lord.”

“Drawn blank this time, Poninski,” said Lord Westhaughton, waving his friend towards the open

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door of the waiting carriage.” Where shall I put you down?”

“At White’s if you will.”

The gentlemen drove away.

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“Look, You have cast out Love I what Gods are these  
You bid me please?  
The Three in One, the One in Three? Not so I  
To my own Gods I go.  
It may be they will give me greater ease  
Than your cold Christ and tangled Trinities.”

KIPLING

## CHAPTER XVII

### MAGA REBELS

MAGA returned to her own room with deliberately slow footsteps. Her body shook with the vehemence of anger roused by the collective suggestions conveyed to her understanding by Count Poninski in her own language. Miss Julia's frequent displays of displeasure she had contrived to ignore, feigning an ignorance it was difficult to dispute.

Count Felix went straight to his point. In answering the summons to the library she had no idea as to its reason. She was taken by surprise when addressed fluently in the dialect of her own district. Reluctantly she admitted his comprehension of the basic mentality of her peasant class. He knew! How did he know? By what methods had he acquired occult knowledge jealously guarded by the initiated? He had not been lucid. Was his masterful attitude due to the authoritative mentality of his nobility, or was he one of the "elect" in the ranks of the underworld legion?

Surprise had dulled her observation. He had questioned: she had replied. Baffled rage shook her again. Who was he to suggest dictated terms? To force her apart from her nursing? But she could fight! Ah, yes, if necessary to the death!

At the top of the stairs Dlugoss met her, nuzzling her hand as she extended it to stroke his broad nose. The half-blinded beast seemed strangely gentle. His lacerated eye-socket was partly healed, but custom

had not inured him to the loss of his eye. He blundered into furniture, especially in the half-light, and sometimes whimpered softly as he nosed his way between the bushes and shrubs in the garden.

She fondled his head, murmuring reassuringly—

“They are all accursed people, these English dogs,” she told him; “they blind dumb animals in malice, or let their children do it, and threaten, aye threaten, if their way is crossed.

“But let them beware. All country folk are not fools! Among ourselves we guard the wisdom of the ages, the wisdom which makes men wise.”

Talking to the dog, she passed into her room, closing the door and locking it. For some moments she walked to and fro, restlessly pondering the gist of the conversation in the library. From the back of a drawer she took out an egg-shaped globe of crystal. Holding it in her clasped hand she resumed her walk. When the coldness of the globe turned to warmth she sat down, holding it against the black sleeve of her gown. Long and earnestly she looked at the smooth surface, but without finding what she sought.

“Naught but a shadow before a crimson glow,” she muttered. “It must portend a fire I Well, so that we find the iron staircase clear, what matters it?”

Lycanthia’s imperative knock on the door interrupted her self-assayed seance.

“I come, my pet,” she called. “Have a patience. Dlugoss keeps vigil with me—the poor one, silently

bewailing his blinding by those spawns of wickedness.”

The vitality of youth lent a fictitious glow of beauty to Lycanthia’s pale face. The close-fitting sealskin coat and round turban hat in orange velvet fastened at one side with the breast feathers of a pheasant, became her well.

“Much has happened since you drove to town.”

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“What then?”

“I will tell you. It is not pleasant to the ears.”

Lycanthia threw off her coat. From the mantel-shelf she took a cigarette-box. Lighting a cigarette, she seated herself on a low stool and drawing her dog to her side, one hand caressing his square head, said abruptly—

“Now the happenings?”

Maga’s response was deliberately guarded. Of what use to say too much? Sufficient was better than overstatement. Poninski had suggested more than he affirmed. His knowledge might not be as great as she feared. To share knowledge is to share power. The darkness of her soul’s ritual abhorred the curiosity of the uninitiated. There was danger in it. She and her like invited certain risks by the dominance of a Master not prone to mercy.

Even her nursling, early offered as a sacrifice to the God of her understanding, knew only in part.

So, deliberately she detailed as much of the interview in the library as seemed advisable.

“The Blichowsky family, I know of them. An ancestor of this Count Felix lies in the Waivel. He spoke of you; of Kritzulesco. He said the English lord, your cousin, thinks you are too old to retain the nurse of your youth. That I should go to my own home—among my own people. Fool that he is, not to know that my home is where you are! The child given into my arms to foster in place of the one I bore, but which Kritzulesco took from me. Now they, these English cousins would take you in the fulness of your coming womanhood and cast me out—leave me comfortless!” Her voice betrayed an emotion fierce in intensity.

Lycanthia listened, outwardly unmoved. What

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effect her nurse’s avowal made could not be observed from the stillness of her attitude.

Maga watched her. Even her penetrating all-devouring love was no magic wand to conjure up the hidden workings of Lycanthia’s mind.

“Who knows you as I do? Who has watched over you all these years?” She paused, emotion choked her voice. “Who can soothe you as I, when those racking headaches take away your strength? Who can charm you to a deep sleep when your rest-less blood would drive you forth? That heritage from Kritzulesco bred into your blood and bone by his fierce longing for the one woman he craved, out of the thousands of women on the steppes of his land.”

“My aunt would not send you away against my wish. She means to be kind. I feel affection in her look

—in her eyes. But she and I are not akin. I must be of my father. Here I have no footing; I feel it; I know it.”

“Then let us go! Steal away to the land of our birth. My people will take you in, since you cannot return to the castle.”

Slowly Lycanthia turned and looked at her nurse.

“One fact you forget, Maga; to return to Poland needs money for our journey and for our food when we get there.”

“Kritzulesco left you an income.”

“I have nothing until I am twenty-one. It is the law. My money is kept by two persons chosen by my father and they can give it me, or refuse it me until I am twenty-one.”

“Then that is a bad law. To endow, yet to with-hold! Ah! my pretty one, how much better you had married Adam Lubomviski. A man of your own race who loves you well.”

“To marry Adam Lubomviski to escape from this

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England and Aunt Julia would be to pay a price not worth it.”

“But you would be in your own land! Free, free, free. Not cooped within this respectable little country with its smugness; its ignorance.”

Lycanthia listened, smoking cigarettes and stroking Dlugoss. She had matured since her arrival in England. Removed from the vastness of her native land, the long, straight roads, the fiat steppes stretching from horizon to horizon and bare of landmarks to break the monotony, her young ideas had been forced into a



compact groove. Youth learns through the eyes. The wild blood from her ancestry urged her to desperate physical exertions. The sober reflections, issuing from the stable English mentalities in her aunt's house, called into overt action the undeveloped instincts transmitted by her English mother.

Maga was all Pole. She sensed the warring elements in her foster-child, and feared them. Not so much because of their antagonism to hers, but because not sharing, she could not combat them.

Keenly she watched Lycanthia's face. This was the crucial moment in their lives. Her passionate devotion to the girl blinded her to interests other than her own.

If Miss Julia succeeded in imposing her will, in forcing compliance upon Lycanthia, then it would be a struggle between her—Maga—and the Englishman. She did not recognize Lord Westhaughton as an antagonist. Her reactions to the force of the masculine sex was the natural servility of her class and race, effected through her emotions. That the same result might produce in Lycanthia a similar reaction, did not occur to her fierce possessiveness. Westhaughton and Poninski left an impression of attractiveness purely sexual. Miss Julia repelled by the dominance

of her legal position: the acknowledged relationship between herself and Lycanthia. Therein lay Miss Julia's power. Maga stood in the background of authority; her strength confined within the circle of Lycanthia's youth.

Clenching her hands in the desperation of fear, she asked:

“What shall you do?”

“What they all wish. Go to Brighton with my aunt. It is for two weeks. You must take my poor Dlugoss for long walks. The spring will soon be here; the dark days turn to light. We cannot go back to Poland until I am twenty-one and my own mistress. That is my father’s will.”

“Or his command. Framed to carry out his secret longings for contact with the woman he loved. To you he gave little thought.”

“That is as may be. Yet he chose my aunt out of all his own relations to send me to after his death. He thought highly of her.”

“Revenge only.” The bitter words flew like darts against Lycanthia’s understanding.

“He knew you would be difficult. To this end he bred you. Not for your own sake, but to show his power. Hour after hour he brooded. Then he drank. Then he rode forth to his farms; his hounds; his forests; ever returning to the burning memories of his English love.”

Faint rebellion against pregnant facts stirred Lycanthia to the retort:

“Of what use to recall the dead days of a dead man?”

“Because the happenings of those days live on, colouring your life and your fate.” She laughed harshly. “Your fate was written in blood on your forehead in the depths of Kritzulesco’s forest by the Saar.”

The literal meaning of this outburst passed over Lycanthia's understanding. She received it metaphorically, or as a reference to her Catholic baptism in the chapel of the castle.

Suddenly her softened mood changed.

"The stigma of the Cross," she jeered. "The sign of a superstition flooded in water which carries it forth into the abyss of oblivion."

Did she realize the pith of her outburst? Half emotional, but subconsciously dictated by a will superimposed upon her own since babyhood.

The strained muscles of the older woman's face relaxed at the girl's words. Satisfaction revealed itself in her slackened poise.

"The heritage of our blood spoke in your words," she muttered; "it is that which binds us: you, the great lady from the castle, and I, the serving-woman from the peasant's cottage."

Lycanthia threw off the veiled suggestion from her foster-mother's mind. She regained her personal initiative.

"It may be so. Yes, I believe it is. You have more fluency of speech; you think of deeper things than the ordinary peasants in our villages."

Maga laughed—a short, amused, even sneering laugh.

"The high nobility do not know the thoughts of the peasants. I, who swing between the two, know that cunning is oft-times more powerful than the wits of a

clever man. That slyness may veil understanding. Malice be mistaken for sympathy.

“Oh! aye, we fool the high-born ones. And why not? We must live. We know, but we will not confess, they are cleverer than we are. We bewail we have not what we desire. But they? They get and enjoy; it is by the magic of the mind of which they—the high-born—hold the secret. That magic

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can never be ours—we, the ‘unborn.’ But we say— we are more numerous than you—so we *will* share. If you refuse we will destroy you and your possessions. And every hundred years or so that is what the ‘unborn’ do in every land and clime.”

“Old Prince Jablonowski was a clever man. Almost do I believe, Maga, there is truth in the story of your ‘high-born’ heritage.”

“I am proud of it, my little Countess. It pleases me to know the ‘high-born’ in you flows from the same spring as the ‘high-born’ in me. My blood and a foster-mother’s affection makes us one, more surely than you can ever be with your English aunt.”

“Be not jealous, Maga. Think of how much of my life has been passed with you. Even now, do I forget you?”

“No, no, my little one. Truly do you speak! But my blood runs hot when they speak of separation, and my thoughts fly back to those other days when where you went, I went.”

“I go to Brighton with my aunt. That is settled, Maga, but in two weeks I return.”

“That is so, little Countess. I will prepare your clothes.”

Her words were humble, but fiery coals glowed beneath the heaped-on slack of resignation.

“The curious Crime, the fine  
Felicity and flower of wickedness.”

BROWNING

“We meet in an evil land  
That is near to the gates of hell.”

KIPLING

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MISS JULIA GOES TO BRIGHTON

THE exhilarating air of Brighton, together with brilliant sunshine and the gaiety of its fashionable crowd, rapidly dissipated Miss Julia's morbid reactions to the tragedies at Hampstead.

The ferocious depredations of the supposedly rabid dog had impressed their horrors deeply on her sensibilities.

For the first time in her guarded life, Miss Julia was brought suddenly within the orbit of life's common tragedies.

The mangled remains of her valuable carriage horses were the unexpected heralds of the wholesale slaughtering of her humble neighbour's children. She felt entangled in a mesh of horrors where death was dealt out with the gory vigour of a butcher's knife.

She could not disabuse herself from an altogether imaginary implication of participation in a bloody orgy at once terrifying and repellent. She dreamed of it by night, and retained the ghastly episode in the forefront of her thoughts by day.

Lycanthia was not so morbidly impressed. Youth, and a less sensitive imagination, enabled her to throw off the recollections her aunt found overwhelming.

Before returning to London and his duties in the House of Lords, Lord Westhaughton charged his young cousin impressively not to discuss the murders at Hampstead.

“If your aunt begins the conversation, turn it off

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in another direction. The animal is bound to be caught sooner or later. The police are on the alert; so are the farmers. The various hunts have been warned. She seems to think because her carriage-horses were the first victims, and Cockspur’s brood of unruly children outside her gates the second, a third visitation is certain.

“Nothing of the sort. The odds are the savage animal is dead. Such ferocity tends to destroy. One day its carcass will be found in some copse or wood; anyway, it won’t follow her down to Brighton.”

“I promise to do all I can, Cousin Edward.” She blinked nervously. “I am not clever, you know.”

He looked kindly at her.

“Well, well, at seventeen we were all a little *gauche*—some are cocksure of themselves—mistaking ignorance for knowledge. I know. I have been through that period. Not understanding old Mother Earth’s way with her children. Trying to pit my ideas of social reforms against her age-old wisdom. Youth goes forth to fight—at least the youth that is worth anything.”

“The English customs do not please me, Cousin Edward. They press me down. These stuffy houses—so many curtains and carpets! No space! The narrow streets! The cart-tracks over the heath, winding—grass-grown. It is all too little; too close together. It is stifling.”

He looked at her curiously. Something childish in the presentation of ideas he had not considered of



importance, stirred a sentimental sympathy which he concealed by saying:

“This is your mother’s country. She was happy here. Surely some of her tastes have descended to you?”

“No,” she answered him gravely. “I think I am all my father. He said so.”

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“Try and reconcile yourself to your mother’s old home and associations. It will not be difficult. You are young.”

“And a Pole! But for the present I will be my aunt’s niece.”

After her cousin’s departure she wandered restlessly over the hotel, returning at intervals to the sitting-room reserved for their use.

Miss Julia, seated on a high-backed chair by the window, dividing her attentions between the gay scene along the sea-front and a delicate piece of embroidery, said:

“Cannot you settle down quietly for half an hour?”

“There is nothing for me to do. Away from Maga and Dlugoss I feel lost.” Approaching Miss Julia, she asked: “Do you never feel wicked, auntie?”

Miss Julia looked at her in surprise. She considered the question.

“It depends what you mean by wickedness.”

A satisfactory definition was difficult.

Lycanthia watched her aunt’s face.

“You always seem calm—so still. I can almost hear you think.”

“So long as my thoughts remain under my own control, there is no objection to your knowing them.”

“That is what I meant. You never seem to have unruly thoughts. Everything is proper—well placed. I wonder if an earthquake would shake you?”

“Really, Lycanthia! What an extraordinary conversation. Temperamentally your mother and I were much alike.”

“Ah!” The exclamation was pregnant with meaning. “But she married my father—and you!—Why, auntie, you never came awake.”

Miss Julia coloured violently. Her self-control,

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weakened by the agitating week at Hampstead, forsook her.

“Why will you force into our conversation a continual reminder of a long-past episode in your father’s life? The recollection is painful. To you it can mean nothing—or, at most, a romantic moment in a misplaced infatuation. It could not be—it was not — more than that. In marrying my sister he showed the whole world his mistake. Why exhibit to the curiosity of strangers the intimate lives of your dead parents?”

Lycanthia’s answer sounded heartless.

“Because it amuses me. I do not remember Pauline, but my father said she was a pale reflection of a virgin soul, whose lamp of life he could not light.”

Almost maliciously she watched her aunt. Miss Julia’s tapering fingers relaxed their hold on the embroidery; unnoticed it slid to the floor. An

expression of pain fluttered across her face. She looked at Lycanthia.

“Are we never to be friends? I have asked you repeatedly to refrain from mentioning your dead father’s aberrations of his bachelor days. If we are to live together, as was his wish, in amity, as is my wish and should be yours, the past must remain closed.

“Surely the terrible events of the weeks at Hampstead are exciting enough to engage your evident love of sensation, without delving into years whose events you only know by hearsay.”

“Life is dull in England! If my father had not known you, I should not be here now. The past formed my present. Do you wonder I think of that?” Her voice was sullen.

Miss Julia made an impulsive movement indicative of her hopeless abandonment of an understanding

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between herself and this secretively wilful girl, whose better feeling she failed to reach.

Later in the afternoon, when Lycanthia had gone with some cousins to a tea-party, Miss Julia sat and pondered over a situation rapidly becoming impossible.

She felt strangely helpless. During her father’s lifetime her happiness was within his possessive love; her security under the daily routine of his life. Endowed with splendid health, she had enjoyed the sheltered existence made possible by his forethought. No other man had ventured to intrude matrimonial intentions to disturb her peace. Her fiery Polish suitor had not

hidden his pretensions from the knowledge of their little world. Her brief courtship was common knowledge, its sequence variously interpreted.

Lycanthia's sturdy independence, her disregard for reticence on a matter so important to herself, forced Miss Julia to a distasteful retrospection.

Looking back, she could not see wherein she had erred. At no moment of her acquaintance with Count Kritzulesco had she encouraged an admiration, instant in its manifestations. From the beginning she had avoided him. Not only in person, but mentally. The insistence of a passion she was incapable of returning repelled her. Its recollection surged up now, to bewilder. Had the years brought a better understanding? Could she, by submitting in those vanished days to his emotional dominance, have grown to love him?

Instinct told her that love, to be permanent, must be spontaneous; it could not be forced.

Suddenly she sensed a past with fuller possibilities. Days whose amber glow, enhanced with the tender rose of love blooming to a more perfect affection.

A woman whose emotional depths had not been stirred by the vitality of a man, is an undeveloped woman.

"A virgin soul," Kritzulesco had dubbed her. Bluntly truthful, but at least understanding. She might be that—she really did not know. Innocence was a pale substitute for knowledge. Its possession, generally glorified as a virtue, might in some cases prove destructive. Had it been so in hers?

Across the tranquil years of her cultured maturity came the glowing remembrance of Kritzulesco's passionate devotion. For twenty years the armour of her frigidity had frozen its approach; now it touched her, guided to the one vulnerable joint in her emotional armour by *his* daughter. Something of the magnitude of what he had to bestow, was borne in upon her shrinking comprehension. Lycanthia, child of the woman he had married to be the instrument of his purpose, was the pivot of his directing will. The blood link between himself and the woman he loved. The living embodiment of passion's tenacity. Before the immensity of his love realized too late, she felt humbled. Her maiden pride had been too cold, too immature to respond to the disturbing elements in their acquaintanceship. From the distance of the years she viewed him more kindly. Lycanthia remained to test her softened mood.

When the girl returned from her tea-party the change in her aunt's greeting was perceptible. Miss Julia was more human, less rigid in her social formality. There was warmth where before was a reserve, severe and unresponsive. Lycanthia welcomed it. Deprived of a mother's tenderness and shut out from her father's heart, which had withered from the fire of his hopeless passion, Maga had been a passionate substitute. That much of its force sprang from an unholy source did not stay its quality. Such as it was, it was genuine. Miss Julia's softened mood was a victory for Lycanthia's persistence, but the hidden working of her aunt's

delayed appreciations was not visible to her eager eyes.

Nor could Miss Julia disclose the measure of her enlightenment without desecrating the dead Pauline's memories as a wife.

Silence was imposed by delicacy. Lycanthia felt the magnetism of confidence before it had been definitely expressed. The girlish pride of an independent nature had drawn a barrier between herself and her aunt. Then Miss Julia yielded to an overwhelming emotion. Its direction came from the unseen forces created by an affection repulsed, but indestructible. The medium of its manifestation was Lycanthia. This fact Miss Julia recognized and rejoiced in accepting.

From his abiding place in a mansion of the universe, was Kritzulesco conscious of his victory? Could he know that at last contact was made with the soul of the woman he had vainly loved on earth? Love is indestructible if shorn of selfishness, and Kritzulesco's love for Julia Mortimer-Beltane was the loftiest emotion of his life.

"Lycanthia," her aunt said shyly, "let us try to understand each other better. We must do so. You were entrusted to me by your father. For that confidence I am grateful; neither you nor I must fail him."

"That is the first kind remark you have made about my father. I believe his thoughts were always of you when he gave himself time to think. When his dark fits came on him he drank and drank, sitting in the stone-flagged hall, with the dogs sleeping under the table. When I saw his brooding face I went to Maga; the servants kept to the kitchen."

“But,” interrupted Miss Julia, disinclined to encourage morbid reflections, “there were weeks—even months—when your father took you round his farms

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and to the hunting and shooting parties. Those occasions are what you miss now.”

“Yes and no. It is my father I miss. At Hampstead we are a family of women; it is lonely without a man.”

“You are going through the same sad period as I did when my father died. It will pass; you are young; life has scarcely begun for you.”

“Does life always begin when one is young? I mean, youth might last long, the aimless groping from day to day with nothing happening. Perhaps the real thing only begins when one is old.”

Lycanthia stumbled over the words as she spoke. Her aunt looked puzzled, as she listened to the tentative suggestion made, half as an appeal for enlightenment, but almost as much as a statement of conclusions.

“I suppose that would be possible.”

“Yes—I think so. My life began when I danced among the glasses on my father’s dining-table. That night I knew there was Life outside my nursery; light more brilliant than the rushlight flickering in a basin on the floor. It was only when I slept I forgot the dullness of the long days spent in my whitewashed nursery. Maga taught me the village songs and stories, and took me for walks when the days were fine. After Pauline died I seldom saw my father. He was away

from the Castle, at Wien or Berlin. Then Miss Lynne came. I grew older and my father took me with him. Life was fuller, but through it all Maga remained.”

Miss Julia’s comment was cautious.

“Your nurse’s devotion has been praiseworthy. I understand your affection, but now you must go out into the great world. You have long outgrown your whitewashed nursery at Kornenbourg.”

Lycanthia made no reply. Sitting on a velvet-covered couch, her long legs extended before her in a

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relaxed attitude abhorred by Miss Julia, she meditatively prepared a cigarette—another habit Miss Julia intensely disliked.

An air of masculine virility hung about Lycanthia’s long hands and her nicotine-stained fingers.

Her sentimental reflections of her childhood lost force when compared with the movements of her unusual hands, so out of keeping with the attributes of her sex and age.

If, as she stated—for her words amounted to a “statement” rather than an expression in ordinary conversation—her “fife” had begun at her fifth year, her apparent “hardness” of personality might be the result of experience rather than the spontaneous revelation of character.

Miss Julia’s softened emotions sensed the gulf between herself and this oddly self-reliant girl. Unbridgable it loomed. Nearer to Kritzulesco she might be, more kindly reminiscent of him, but as



distant in spirit from Lycanthia as when she met her in the hall at Belit Place on her arrival.

The brooding girl silently repelled her aunt's unspoken sympathy. She did not want it; moreover, she refused it. No words passed between them; none were needed. The contest was one of the spirit rather than of human personality.

Baffled by a repelling force impervious to her proffered sympathy, wounded by its chill rejection, Miss Julia clung to the changed focus so patiently manipulated by her dead brother-in-law.

Here was his child. She thought of Lycanthia as Kritzulesco's—not as Pauline's, and she would cherish her. It might be her gentler thoughts would reach him, consoling where once she had wounded. The universe of God is vast, its mysteries beyond the understanding of man. But the stream of love flows on,

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covering with its beneficent laving the bleeding wounds of men.

The next week they returned to Hampstead. Miss Julia, clear-eyed and confident, seeing the future with renewed hope and the promise of a sympathetic response to the repressed affection which henceforward she would bestow on Kritzulesco's daughter.

Lycanthia watched with cynical amusement the trembling diffidence in her aunt's demeanour. For herself life's fulfilment flowed from Maga. She asked nothing more of life than her foster-mother's care. So far it had sufficed; care and her soothing presence.

Her triumphantly gleaming eyes, veiled beneath their blue-veined lids, betrayed the Polish woman's satisfaction as her foster-child greeted her.

“At last I come back. Where you are is my home, Maga.”

“Which is as it should be, my little one. From my breast I nourished you, in my arms I protected you. What can a foster-mother give more than her all?”

“Fiction lags after truth, invention is unfruitful, and  
imagination cold and barren.”

BURKE

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## CHAPTER XIX

### LYCANTHIA PUZZLES HER COUSIN

MISS JULIA returned to Hampstead at the end of April. In London she and Lycanthia lunched in Berkeley Square with the Westhaughtons, who were settled in for the London season.

Lycanthia showed no interest in the proposed arrangements for her presentation at one of the May Drawing-Rooms.

As her aunt and cousin discussed the details, she sat negligently reclining on a low couch smoking cigarettes with a rapidity suggestive of recklessness.

Lady Westhaughton glanced at her with unconcealed irritation. Many vagaries she condoned as being habits usual in an alien society. As she looked, she touched the fringe of understanding. This foreign cousin had imported difficulties into Julia Mortimer-Beltane's life not understood by the ramifications of the family.

The girl was in a curious state of unrest. It might be not really happy nor satisfied. Yet seemingly she had much conducive to happiness.

Lady Westhaughton looked again at the relaxed figure sprawling on her couch, upholstered in *petit point*, its occupant so out of harmony with the refinements of polite society. Yet neither uncultured nor vulgar. She sighed. Lack of a mother's guidance must be the explanation.

Suddenly she asked—

“What church do you attend, Lycanthia?”

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The question startled Miss Julia. She flushed in embarrassment, for Lycanthia's negligence of her religious observances had given her considerable anxiety.

Soon after her niece's arrival she mentioned the name of the Roman Catholic Chapel and its vicinity, but loyal Churchwoman as she was, did not press the matter; she shrank from encouraging a form of Christian worship she regarded as largely superstition.

Lycanthia looked directly at Lady Westhaughton. She was conscious of disapproval directed towards herself. But its cause was not apparent.

“I went so often to Mass and prayers at the Castle I am tired of it. Our priest was old—often sleepy from drinking too much wine—sometimes he was silly, just that. A dirty, mumbling old man.”

“I believe the Roman Catholic priest at the chapel your aunt mentioned is an able man. Devout and much liked.” Lady Westhaughton's voice was icy. “All young girls should observe the usages of their church.”

Lycanthia was unresponsive; she did not recognize Lady Westhaughton as an authority in her life. One monitor was sufficient, and Miss Julia filled that role.

“Perhaps you were never sent twice a day to chapel. My father did not go. Miss Lynne was taken into Cracow once a month to a Protestant chapel, she did not come to ours.”

“It is dangerous for a young girl to disregard the moral safeguards of religion.”

“How? In what way?” Lycanthia had no objection to being questioned, but privately thought her peeress cousin a tiresome person concerning herself with the moral effects of a form of religion she herself did not practise.

The question was difficult to answer. Lady Westhaughton belonged to a social coterie unaccustomed to

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hear its dictates questioned. She was unpleasantly conscious her young cousin remained unabashed by her strictures on conduct. Almost she suspected a gleam of amusement in the pale, deeply-set eyes, watching her over the cigarette smoke.

“At Christmas and Easter you are required to make your devotions strictly in accordance with your Church’s requirements,” she replied stiffly.

“Maybe,” agreed Lycanthia, “but if I do not, no one will know.”

Lady Westhaughton, a little out of breath with the natural indignation provoked by a rejection of much well-intentioned advice, abruptly changed the conversation.

“Julia, do you remember Montague Scott—the man who was much about town the year Kritzulesco married Pauline?”

“Yes, I remember him.”

Lady Westhaughton laughed.

“Of course you do. Another devoted admirer of yours! Well, he has succeeded to his uncle’s estates and the title. He came back from India last week and

looked Edward up at White's. He asked after you; if you were married. He is to take his seat next week and I am going down to the House to see him."

Miss Julia remembered Montague Scott well. His persistent pursuit of herself; his repeated offers of marriage. Finally his throwing up his commission in the Guards and departing to India or Africa—she could not remember which. She knew it was her refusal of him which sent him flying out of England. One among many in those days—now twenty years behind her. "A nice, tall, blue-eyed boy," she had described him in a letter to her married sister. "Father is disappointed I have refused him."

"He asked Edward if he thought you would care to

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receive him if he came to Belit Place to pay his respects."

"If he cares to come so far." Miss Julia was uncertain if she desired to renew an acquaintance abruptly ended twenty years ago.

Her cousin laughed.

"You cannot be unaware you are still a handsome woman. Far younger-looking than I who am, in actual years, your junior. I hope you do receive Montague. It will be interesting to see how he reacts. Edward says he is a handsomer man at forty-seven than he was in his twenties." What she did not mention was her husband's comments—"I believe Montague still retains tender memories of Julia. He's a damned fine fellow and there's nothing I should like to bring off so much as a marriage between those two."

Later in the afternoon, driving back to Hampstead, behind a new pair of bay carriage horses, Lycanthia asked ironically—

“Is Cousin Constance the person who arranges the affairs of the ladies of the family?”

“What a curious question! Certainly not. She is interested in all family affairs and knowing her all my life, we discuss them when we are together.”

“I shocked her about not going to church.”

“You mistake the meaning of her remarks. We are loyal adherents to the Established Church. If we could do as our consciences dictate, we would prefer to see you attend *our* church services. But you were brought up in the religion of your father, and we respect his wishes.”

“Aunt Julia, you talk like a book.”

“I endeavour to speak correct English.”

“I admit the correctness, but somehow it sounds too formal.”

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A reprimand was on the tip of Miss Julia’s tongue, then she recollected her determination to try softer methods with her bewildering niece.

“Bring Dlugoss to see me after tea,” she said graciously. “Poor dog, I pity him in his blindness. Those unfortunate children were indeed cruel.”

\* \* \* \* \*

No further visits from the mysterious dog had disturbed the tranquillity of Hampstead. A new stone wall had been erected between the lane and the



groom's quarters at Belit Place, also a substantial gate surmounted by spiked iron railings.

"These precautions may not be needed," Smith told Miss Julia when she went to inspect the new wall, "but there's no 'arm in making the jump-over more difficult."

"I suppose the animal was a dog?" she queried dubiously. "Major Carruthers is positive it was a wolf."

"Meaning no disrespect to the Major, the animal who killed my fine 'orses was a dog. A great big fellow, maybe he travelled miles. Of course I never saw the one at Cockspur's, so can't say, but we don't breed wolves in these parts."

As Miss Julia turned away to re-enter the house, he hastily recollected another matter.

"Beg pardon, miss, but when we were putting up the gates, Miss Lycanthia's maid asked if a proper door handle and catch could be put on the little wall door between the dog's garden-run and the road. Seems she lost the door key when walking on the heath."

"How did you understand her meaning?"

"A few words and by signs. We understood all right."

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"Have you put on the handle?"

"Just a good sound latch, easily opened from the road. She says she will leave the door on the latch when she goes out and lock it when she gets back."

"There seems no objection to that, providing she does lock it."

“Might I be so bold, miss, to ask if you’ll mention it to Miss Lycanthia, and she’ll tell her nurse. Then the woman will properly understand.”

Smith’s suggestion reached Maga in due course. It was a trivial matter, but using the door so frequently when taking Dlugoss for exercise the new door handle made egress easy and was preferable to continually losing the key.

“There was a Door to which I found no Key:  
There was a Veil past which I could not see:  
Some little Talk awhile of Me and Thee  
There seemed—and then no more of Thee and Me.

“Then to the rolling Heav’n itself I cried  
Asking, ‘What Lamp had Destiny to guide  
Her little Children stumbling in the Dark?’”,

OMAR KHAYYAM

“Very softly down the glade runs a waiting, watching shade,  
And the whisper spreads and widens far and near;  
And the sweat is on thy brow, for he passes even now—  
He is Fear, oh little Hunter, he is Fear!”

KIPLING

## CHAPTER XX

### LYCANTHIA GOES TO SCOTLAND

THE summer of 180— passed pleasantly for the family and household at Belit Place.

The mysterious dog did not reappear. A few intangible stories of a big dog racing over the heath were circulated among the farmers. The police refusing to attach importance to them, ascribed them to the excited imaginations of nervous persons.

Lycanthia was taken to a Drawing-room by Lady Westhaughton, and later received a formal command to a State concert. Through family influence she went to the principal balls of the season, sometimes with Miss Julia, at others with aunts or cousins.

Ascot interested her more than all the gaieties of London, but she did not appreciate the social importance of this period of her existence. Picnics, river parties and the usual frivolities of a debutante's life embarrassed by its imposed negation of personal initiative.

After Goodwood Miss Julia took her to pay a visit in Cumberland, and in August they went north for the important twelfth. Among the heather and the grouse, Lycanthia was happier. She was an excellent shot. The excitement of organized sport provided the exercise her vitality made imperative. No tramp over the moors fatigued her, she held her own in endurance with the hardest sportsman. Among her own sex she was a silent participant in bedroom gossip.

With men she was one of themselves with the guns and dogs, but aloof in conversation—even churlish at

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any attempt to show her the deferences accorded to ladies. Montague Scott, an absentee from Scotland for twenty years, met Lycanthia and her aunt at Aboyne. In him she showed more interest, but for a reason not apparent to casual onlookers.

Her acute observation pierced the deferential consideration he showed her aunt on the many occasions of their meeting. Secret hopes, held in abeyance for twenty years, took fresh impetus under the cautious direction of a matured diplomacy.

Encased in the stronghold of her young ignorance and singularly impervious to the propinquity of the opposite sex, she watched the undercurrent of an elderly love affair with scornful ribaldry.

She made no confidante among the several girls staying at Cormorant Towers. Individually, they feared her; her unfeminine physical strength was a menace to their vigorous love of comfort. They could not understand her facility for mixing with the male sex in an unapproachable sexless way. Her effect on men was much as an over-grown, undeveloped boy. The impression remained when alone with the ladies and girls. She was definitely apart from the ordinary.

This was puzzling, even unpleasant. But Lycanthia was pleasing to look at and under her aunt's tuition, well and suitably dressed. The women discussed her peculiarities more discursively than the men. They, knowing she was an excellent though unexciting

companion on the moors, demanding no more than she gave, passed a few comments at odd moments—then forgot her.

Cormorant Towers, a forbidding-looking structure in grey granite, with four corner towers, a formidable entrance-gate and portcullis, commanded the entrance to a deep gorge in the mountains. The rough comfort within the Towers provided a sufficiency for the sportsmen who sought without their precincts the

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provender for their guns, or fish from the loch for their rods. The sport never failed them, though the minor amenities of life sometimes did. No lady accompanied her husband to this bleak place unless she possessed vigour and a keen delight in sport. Joining the guns on their long treks, Miss Julia had her head-groom and a sure-footed, short-legged horse to carry her over the miles, too lengthy to be done on foot.

Given fine weather, these long days in the bracing air of the Highlands held their peculiar charm, intensified by the deep silence of the moors and rocks.

To Lycanthia it revived memories, almost painful, of her Polish home, her father—appreciated in death as he had not been in life; of a girlhood interesting and free from responsibilities. Yet these regrets were as passing shadows across the sun. Deep feelings were submerged under the hardness of an egoism as yet unexpressed; glimpses of this forbidding possibility were accorded Miss Julia when Lycanthia indulged her impish proclivity for shocking her aunt. Yet even then, there was no warmth behind the cold hardness of her

emotions; all avenues to a better understanding were frozen in advance.

The Montague Scott of Miss Julia's debutante days, through a succession of deaths succeeded his cousin, the Earl of Micheldowne, in the title, a year before Lycanthia went to Hampstead.

Pauline, her mother, was a memory so faint, he hesitated to affirm any recollection of her. Her one claim to remembrance was her sisterly relationship to Miss Julia. Lycanthia was intriguing as an unknown quantity imposed upon a circle of persons bred to the same uniformity. From this circle she stood apart. Micheldowne put her aloofness down to the mixed blood of the Slav and the English warring against unity. He reluctantly decided Pauline Mortimer-Beltane's daughter was an anachronism in the

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conventional society of the Highlands. So far his criticism gave him understanding; then he questioned his own decision. What was wrong with the girl? Beyond an unconventional proclivity for smoking and a nonchalant imbibing of more wine than was usual for a carefully-nurtured gentlewoman, he could find no fault. Both these idiosyncrasies he ascribed to her Polish ancestry.

His interest in Julia Mortimer-Beltane required no impetus to its reawakening. In his young manhood she had stood out as the one desirable crown to the healthy ambitions his birth and training permitted.

Returning to London and re-entering the familiar scenes of his youth, he expected changes. He found

them less than he feared, more satisfying than he hoped. The unfledged ambitions of twenty-three were merged in the reasoned certainties of a finely-tempered manhood.

As such, Miss Julia saw him—and more. Her newly-awakened mother sense remembered the ardent boy and found him again beneath the polished maturity of the more desirable man.

The solicitude for the woman he had loved was increased when he realized Lycanthia was living with her aunt.

The young girl failed to attract men, though—superficially—she had the qualifications generally desired. She puzzled Micheldowne by a silent suggestion of unnatural sophistication—hidden, yet virile. These conclusions were not hastily formed. He met Lycanthia several times in London; later at Aboyne, and when she and Miss Julia reached Cormorant Towers he was a fellow-guest for three days.

The day after his arrival, Lycanthia was shut up in her bedroom with one of her debilitating headaches. Her absence gave him an opportunity of discussing her peculiarities with Miss Julia.

“I see no resemblance to her mother in her,” he said. “The Pauline I remember was impulsive—charmingly feminine—most lovable. Does she inherit these somewhat bizarre habits from Count Kritzulesco’s family?”



“I never met Kritzulesco’s relations, but the free, yet isolated life Lycanthia lived at Kornenbourg with her father explains much. From incidents she related she was too much with the peasants in her father’s village. Her foster-mother was daughter and wife of foresters. She still has her as personal maid. Doubtless, after Pauline’s death, the woman had unlimited opportunities of going among her own people. We are disturbed about the influence the woman, Maga, has over her.”

“Is the woman here?”

“No. She remains at Belit Place. My maid gives such assistance as Lycanthia requires. That is not much. At present Lycanthia is locked up in her bedroom—has been so since dinner last night when she complained of a nervous headache.”

“She seemed well enough out on the moor yesterday.”

“These headaches seem constitutional. Her maid says she has had them since childhood.”

“Must take responsibility from you, having with her a woman who understands.”

“I am not so sure of that,” Miss Julia shook her head, a sad expression creeping over her face. “Maga stands between Lycanthia and her mother’s friends. Westhaughton and I do not like her influence. He and I are her English guardians.”

The conversation was interrupted by their host.

“Micheldowne, two of the keepers say a wolf is loose on Dunn Fell. They met it by a sheep-fold last night. The moon was full and the Fell as clear as in the day.”

“Got out of a showman’s caravan. There are no wild wolves in Scotland.”

“Duncan is afraid for his deer. He asks if we can manage a tracking party to-night. The men are positive the animal they saw was a wolf. Even if it is an escaped one, the danger to the deer remains.”

“My dear fellow, just as you wish. Count me among your trackers. Say when and how. But I expect our draw will be blank.”

About eight guns turned out after dinner to negotiate Dunn Fell. It was a gorgeous night, the harvest moon riding high in the clear blue of the heavens. Even the figures of the men cast long shadows over the stubby grass and moss. Save for the callings of the night-birds, and a bleat from a restless sheep in a distant fold, a peaceful silence lay over the country-side.

As Micheldowne had foretold, the patient watchers drew a blank. Neither killer-dog nor supposititious wolf skulked over rocks or fells. With the cool air of the coming dawn wafting disillusion over the watching men, sparsely scattered on various vantage stations, their host suggested abandoning the search. Right willingly was his invitation to an early breakfast accepted. The half-jocular comments on the keeper’s credulity in mistaking a wandering dog for a wolf was the sole subject of conversation. Even the dog was credited with a malevolent intention no evidence supported. No damage was done to the fold, not even a stone was displaced.

“Whisky,” murmured one disgusted “gun,” which was a misjudgment, as the keeper, whose imagination ran riot over innocent shadows cast over a rock by the placid moon, was a confirmed teetotaller.

Those members of the house-party who had spent the moonlit night slumbering in their beds, were

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inclined to stress their individual common sense against the midnight credulity of the tracking party.

Miss Julia provided the one temporizing opinion. Remembering the tragic destruction of Cockspur’s children by a mysterious animal, as yet unidentified, her nerves ran riot as the dread possibility was discussed.

She related to Micheldowne the story of her slaughtered horses. The horrible holocaust of the children at the tavern. Major Carruthers’s opinion as to the identity of the ferocious killer.

“Now here again this keeper thinking he saw a wolf by the Dunn Fell sheep-fold.”

“Just a coincidence,” he told her, “nothing more. In the moonlight mistakes are easily made. There are no wolves in the British Isles except those in Zoos.”

Lycanthia was equally incredulous. She joined the house-party at lunch, looking white and shaken after her severe bout of neuralgia.

“If,” remarked Mrs. Gorson, their hostess, “Lycanthia Kritzulesco was my daughter, I would take her to the best doctor in London and see what could be done. The girl looks positively ill. Have you noticed

her hands? Long drawn-out, just skeleton hands, such as might belong to an old woman.”

Lycanthia overheard her hostess’s opinion. She hastened to allay her kind anxiety.

“Maga has her own antidote for me—some medicine made from herbs her people use, I drink and I go to sleep. When I wake the headache has gone but I need much sleep. My nurse says I have had them since I was five years old. My memory does not go clearly back so far—but I always remember headaches.”

The ladies of the party, one by one, displayed more kindly sentiments towards the perversely unconventional girl, whose dark-rimmed eyes betrayed

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intense suffering. Her undisguised preference for men’s society provoked a natural resentment, but the most censorious criticism did not suggest ulterior feminine intentions towards the married.

Her conversation, her lack of fripperies, her disregard for artificial additions to her toilet all affirmed her sexless appreciation of male society. Within the aura of her personality she concealed all display of emotion.

“Not ‘grown up’ yet,” said one father of a family of five tow-headed Scottish lassies. “Not made up her mind what she wants to be.”

“That point has been settled by nature,” his hearer dryly commented. “Some few girls never become wives for home-loving men. She’s one of them.”

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Two days after the all-night vigil on the moors, Miss Julia and Lycanthia left Cormorant Towers. They spent another four weeks in a series of visits in Scotland. The first of October reminded Miss Julia that several social engagements waited on her return to Befit Place. She was surprised at her revived interest in the ordinary events of her carefully-planned life. A few short weeks ago her youth seemed aeons behind. Now she felt divested of middle age—old maidenhood. What mattered the lengthening years if friends were kind? Rich memories gilded the past. Not unsought by desire, though still unwed—that Mecca state of the women of her age and class. To wed or not had been a choice at her own disposal. That knowledge fostered content.

So she returned to Befit Place with joy singing in her voice—her eyes—her heart. Lycanthia, sunning herself in the sun of her aunt's more gentle mood, was happier, less restless and aloof.

The Indian summer of her shadowed youth.

“Life is a passing shadow, the shadow of a bird in his flight.”

TALMUD

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## CHAPTER XXI

### THE KILLER-DOG REVISITS HAMPSTEAD

**C**HILL October delayed its frigid grip until November was stepping on its heels.

Wild storms followed the gradual dismantling of the woodland trees, preparing dim skies, bereft of motion, for the grouping menace of November fogs.

Slowly, almost secretly, furtive whispers once more circulated over the Heath. At first these rumours did not reach Belit Place. They hovered over the tap-room at The Irishman's Castle, brought there by casual toppers.

The tragedy which befell its landlord in the spring, still afforded congenial discussion among the slow-witted. Imagination, that colourless substitute for "Fact," revelled in recalling scenes known by hearsay to the gossipers. Cockspur's presence in the bar was a sign for reticence; good feeling, or the dread of the landlord's displeasure, turned men dumb when Mrs. Cockspur was there. The shock of that wild night's doings still held her in hysteria's grip.

It was to The Irishman's Castle the first news was brought of the return of the killer-dog.

Incredulity barred free discussion; also fear of facing further horrors.

The bringer of the news was a travelling pedlar, in former years a frequenter of The Spaniard Inn, but since the slaughter of the children, he turned aside on

his passing over the Heath to the now more celebrated tavern.

“Hey, Mr. Landlord,” he said, tankard of beer in hand. “How goes the world with you and the Missis?”

“Pretty fair considering all things.”

“Last night I slept at St. Albans, and left there to call and see my cousin Dick three miles out as he takes his milk to London by the early train. I got a bit of a shock, I can tell you, for just before I turned up his lane, a great dog jumped the hedge, snarling something fearful. Away down the lane he went, a dark shadow in the poor light. When I got to Primrose Farm, Bob was ready to start. I told him what I had seen, so he shouted to young Bob to get his gun and see if the sheep were safe in the field. He’d no time himself. He’d got the milk to get to London. I went along with Bob. Sure enough that great beast had been at his devilish work. Three of Bob’s best sheep lay stretched out, their throats just tom out! Lucky I chanced along then, or h’d a’ done worse. My horse always has a row of bells round his collar, and in the still air they jangled fine.”

Cockspur listened intently.

“Might not be the same. Lots of dogs go after sheep. In fact,” he said slowly, “I don’t want to think it is the same. Sends me all of a quiver to think it might.”

“Well, so long”—the pedlar drank off his beer. “Thought I’d let you know. If there’s anything in it the brute won’t stay his bloody work with Bob’s sheep.”

Cockspur mentioned the pedlar’s story to his wife that night. Her affrighted face startled him.

“I can’t stay here on the Heath,” she gasped. “I’ll never get your screech out of my ears! ‘Taint



safe for me or the children to bide here. If the murderous beast comes along again, what's to stop him from rampaging into the house."

"That aint likely. To jump about among children is different to grown men. What has always got me is 'ow'd he know only children slept in the old coach. He never come in the house."

"Perhaps he'll do that next time."

"There's no reason why there should be a next time." Cockspur was perturbed, but not unduly. The past was real, the future indefinite.

Mr. Smith at the stables at Belit Place was warned the next morning by one of the grooms who heard the pedlar's story.

But the precautions already taken for his horses' safety gave him the certainty of a possible future raid being unsuccessful.

Each night the various stables were locked, and the keys brought to his cottage. Neither dog nor wolf could manipulate those keys.

He mentioned the rumour to Mrs. Scott, and she carried it to Miss Julia, who sent for him at once.

"Not that we need concern ourselves about it, miss," he assured her. "Those sheep-killers never go in people's houses. They keep to the open."

"What about the horses?" she reminded him.

"I always believed the groom left the stable-door open, and daren't own up."

"But that does not explain those children at the tavern."

“It was a fearful night, miss. The wind maybe blew the crazy door open.”

“It is all very mysterious and dreadful, Smith— and if I thought there really would be a repetition of those horrors, I would go to London for the winter, or until the animal is caught.”

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To Lycanthia she spoke cautiously. The visit to Scotland had improved the girl's health. The distressing migraine headaches had lessened. She was less restless, and Miss Julia dreaded to arouse her love for the morbid by recalling the tragedies of the spring.

“Someone in the neighbourhood must know about that dog. Major Carruthers says sheep-killers are so clever, they will lie quiet for weeks—then break out again.”

“We had them at home, auntie. But they were shot at sight. My father said a real sheep-killer never reformed. Moreover, the sheep-killer infects other dogs. My father said the hunting instinct is in all dogs, to kill the capture, the logical end.”

“Logical end,” echoed Miss Julia, “it is as well such horrors can be described as logical.”

Lycanthia laughed. “Men hunt and kill. Why blame the dog for doing it?”

Her aunt looked at her. A medley of confused thoughts stemmed the channel of speech. Comparing the actions of men and dogs to a common origin puzzled her. Wherein lay the difference between a killer-dog and a huntsman? One went after his prey equipped with teeth and paws. The other armed with

mechanical contrivances best fitted to his purpose. She also had “hunted,” though not actually killed the quarry.

“Of course, hunting or shooting are sports pursued by trained men.” She felt the retort was feeble. “Game is bred for food, and slaughtered in the most merciful way.”

“I wonder what the pheasants and grouse and hares think about it, not to mention live venison.”

“You certainly have original ideas.”

“Not my own. My father often laughed about the illogical minds of men. He had reason. He was a clever man, he thought much.”

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Swiftly across her memory flashed a vision of his face—seen in the twilight of an autumn day. Ironical, even scornful. He had said, “The wisdom of men! What is it? The forerunner of grief! Men who eschew the human needs of life never find happiness. All that a woman wants is a man. The wise man seeks power. Power to eat when he will—drink as he wants—and a woman to fill his idle hours.”

“Lycanthia,” cried her horrified aunt, “why will you always remember the dark side of your father’s remarks?”

“Because they are true. The wisdom of the ages he called it”; then insinuatingly she said: “the lighter side died when he went away from you.”

“It is terrible to hear how your father impressed his secret pain upon you—an uncomprehending child—

too ignorant to see the obsession of an egotistical mind behind the paternal relationship.”

Lycanthia laughed—the harsh intonation which fitted her hands, but neither age nor sex.

“He hunted, auntie, with the fierceness of his race, the violence of his love, the anguish of the loser.”

Miss Julia looked at her niece. Looked searchingly, almost repelled by a logic unnatural to youth.

Could acquired mental culture be transmitted? Was the wisdom of the ages a well from which that wisdom could be drawn as necessity demanded?

Almost was she tempted to believe it. The physical body with its limitations, the common heritage of the race. The mental from reasoned premises, experienced by the individual, the medium of inequalities.

The trick of keeping the balance between the human and the mental might be known to Lycanthia. Understanding of methods was not necessary to expression.

“Men may be wiser than they know.” She pondered sadly. “How can we judge one another?”

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Into this momentary reflection Lycanthia broke with the practical observation:

“I go to ride this afternoon with Dlugoss to follow. The eye-socket is healed, and he is restless; he needs exercise.”

“Enjoy yourself. The fine weather has ended, but if the rain keeps off, the going over the Heath should be good.”

Later in the afternoon Lord St. Austell called; an unusual attention, as he eschewed social conventions.

“Just came to give you a warning,” he said, in answer to Miss Julia’s unconcealed surprise; “was passing your gates; unfriendly not to turn in. Well, the fact is, one of my men bringing back a couple of horses from the shoeing forge two days ago, early in the morning, saw a big animal, something like a dog, lurching along under your garden wall. It was a horrid-looking brute. A cross between a retriever and some other grey hairy dog. At first he did not think much of it. Wanting a drink, he stopped at The Irishman’s Castle. Talking with the landlord, he let drop a word about the wild-looking dog he had seen by your garden wall. The innkeeper’s wife heard him and went off into a faint. First thing she said when she came round was:

“‘Cockspur, it’s that dog again.’

“The fellow tried to reassure her—reason with her. No use. She got hysterical—screamed and rolled herself about, crying out:

“‘It’s that dog again, prowling round after more children.’

“That mysterious dog is becoming a nightmare to us all. My coachman told me this morning the farmers on the Heath are getting anxious—some persons say the killer is back.

“The rumour reached me. There may be something

in it, or just the excited fancies of the cottagers in their little homesteads. Not many feel secure behind doors

open until sunset, and barred by a rotten wedge of wood at night.”

“Smith had the gates strengthened, and locks up the stables at night. He takes the keys with him. There is a strong bolt inside the postern door in the wall. No dog could break it down.”

“To-night I am dining with Westhaughton. We are arranging dates for the hunts—don’t want to clash with the South Belit—and what our committee has in mind is a big sweep of the whole county, each hunt taking a section, and driving towards one fixed goal. The Spaniard’s Inn is favoured most. This ferocious animal has done his worst work round here. There may be a particular fascination for him here—we are working in the dark. If we come round here we shall look for your kind hospitality.”

“Which you will gladly receive. When are you thinking of making this combined hunt?”

“That our committee will arrange with the others. Certainly before Christmas. There’s not likely to be much frost in November, we generally get muggy weather then.” He hesitated—should he mention a certain peculiar fact, known to four members of the South Belit hunt? Abruptly he decided silence was best. Pity to worry a lady about unpleasant conjectures! Then he took his leave.

The groom had been cautious in describing the appearance of the animal he saw outside the garden wall of Belit Place. He had gone with his conjecture to Major Carruthers. That gentleman’s idea as to the identity of the sought-for killer was soon known among the men in the hunt stables.

“Major says it’s a wolf.”

“T’aint likely! ‘Ow could it be?”

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“My old woman says she believes ’tis the devil.”

“Gar on! Foolish tale.”

“My old woman says ’tis Bible talk. It tells how the devil goes about like a ravening wolf. You can’t have nothing clearer than that.”

“I don’t ’old with the Bible. ’Tis an inciting kind o’ book—naught but fightings and killings.”

“It tells a lot about wolves, and if what the Major says be true, us’d best learn all we can ’bout those unholy beasties.”

“My old woman says Bible tells ’ow the wolves tear the sheep, and fair eat up men’s souls.”

“Don’t they tear up men’s bodies?”

“As to that I can’t say. Anyways if that there dreadful creature as tore up Mister Cockspur’s children be a wolf—well, they do.”

Silence, fraught with uneasiness or disbelief, followed this information. The men brooded over the suggestion without hatching out reassurance.

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In Berkeley Square the same topic received curious consideration.

Major Carruthers’s personal scrutiny of the paw marks in the pitch in the tavern yard, and certain deductions made then, were strengthened by his groom’s account of what he saw.

Directly the man reached the Hunt stable, he had sought Carruthers.

“Beg pardon, Major, but I ve seen a curious-looking dawg, along by the wall of Belit Place. Time did you say, sir? Well, it wanted minutes to six o clock— cold and damp—not much light. I seed that skulking dawg as plain as plain. Long shape, long legs—nose to the ground. But I never seed a dog like him in this ’ere county.”

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“What did you think it was, if not a dog?”

“Couldn’t say, sir. But for all it went so slow, it left deep paw marks in the mud.”

“Left marks? All right, Bishop, I’ll get along and examine those marks.”

He rode over from St. Albans early in the forenoon. Leaving his horse at The Spaniard’s Inn, he walked down the road to Belit Place. The mud was deep by the moss-covered wall. He found what he was seeking. Going down on hands and knees, he carefully looked at the deep indents made by powerful feet, moving slowly, therefore heavily, through the mire. His trained eye knew the difference between the comfort-loving soft pad of a dog, and the powerful claw and long narrow heel of a wolf.

“Well, I’m blowed,” he muttered, rising to his feet. “A stray certainly. Escaped from a zoo or a show-man’s van. The owner must know of his loss. Why hasn’t he notified the police? Afraid of being sued for damages by Miss Mortimer-Beltane and that poor devil the landlord.”



He was tempted to call at Belit Place to discuss this discovery with Miss Julia. She was not uninterested, although probably ignorant. Smith, her head in the stables, was his confidant in most matters concerning horses. He went round to the back entrance. Smith was in the harness-room going over accounts.

“No, sir,” he said, in answer to Major Carruthers’s guarded question, “there’s naught to tell about us here. If that devil’s about again, he ain’t showed his ugly snout here. Begging your pardon, I can’t believe it’s a wolf.”

“Take it from me, Smith, that it is. Spread the idea among the men. Waste of time looking for a dog. The brute has a liking for this place. I can’t think where he lies up between the kills.”

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“There has been a bit of gossip at the tavern this past week. They do tell of folks seeing a misty kind of shape prowling round the farms, but nothing to fix on. Just talk.”

Riding home Carruthers determined to initiate a more definite inquiry into a matter affecting the whole Heath. It was difficult to separate facts from nervous conjectures.

He carried matters further when dining in Berkeley Square. Westhaughton’s interest was centred in Belit Place. Lord St. Austell took the wider view of the dangers to the dwellers on the Heath. The various hunts were sufficiently interested to agree to a combination of resources to sweep the whole country in a comprehensive search.

The quarry might escape, all weak points could neither be located nor strengthened. Organization was as imperative as secrecy.

Micheldowne, coming down from Scotland on business, was included in the dinner at Berkeley Square.

A noted schirriki himself, he admitted incredulity as to the sought-for killer being a wolf.

“Some big half-bred savage mongrel,” he said. “Those killer-dogs are the very devil when they get going.”

“The best method to settle the question is by a combined hunt. We’ll make a definite plan of the whole county—and a bit over—then arrange vantage points for the hounds to start from. We’ll have to get the committees to agree—let the hunts know what’s up at the last moment—musn’t risk leakages. Anyway, we may have a bit of sport.”

“How will you get the hounds to work?”

“Aye—that’ll be the difficulty.”

Micheldowne bent forward. The hunter’s instinct roused his ingenuity.

“I can settle that. The man I had in Africa these past ten years is a Breton, John Trefarrey. His home is at Cowan. His father is chief huntsman to the Count de St. Prix. St. Prix wants me over in December for a week or so. We are to go after boars. If our hounds fail to get on the trail of this mystery brute, he might be willing to bring over three or four of his wolf-hounds. Anyway, I will ask him. From all I have heard it is

time some effort was made to capture this prowling animal.”

The proposal raised certain difficulties, but intensified the thoroughly awakened interest of the assembled men. They discussed various methods—rejecting several, but concentrating on the importance of secrecy.

Finally they decided the first serious drive should be by officials of each hunt, working from their own respective kennels, and towards the Spaniard’s Inn.

“I advise, gentlemen, we carry our revolvers. This drive is for a serious purpose. We are going out after a murderous brute who has shown unusual cunning in his beastly work. It would be foolish to underestimate his intelligence—just because he is—what he is—a four-legged menace to the neighbourhood.”

“Who is to put the matter in hand?”

“Carruthers and I. As a shot I give place to no man. As an organiser Carruthers can give us all points.

So it was agreed.

“Ye too, believers of incredible creeds.  
Whose faith enshrines the monster which it breeds;  
Who, bolder even than Nimrod, think to rise.  
By nonsense heaped on nonsense to the skies.”

THOMAS MOORE.

“O God! it is a fearful thing  
To see the human soul take wing  
In any shape, in any mood.”

BYRON.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE HUNTING OF THE KILLER-DOG

THE brooding stillness of Belit Place, undisturbed by the tempest raging over the Heath, one November night, stirred into life as the door at the top of the iron staircase was opened cautiously by the Polish maid.

For one instant a flickering moonbeam radiated Maga's pale face—half hidden in the blackness of her coiffure.

Triumphant malice crowned by success, revealed itself. Gathering her long cloak round her, she stole, step by step, down—across to the postern door in the wall which, unbarring, she left open.

“Ah,” she muttered, “they think to stay us! We, the powerful—moving behind their ignorance.” She sank her head between her shoulders, shaking herself as though throwing off a lightsome burden in derision.

“How wise these godly people think themselves.” She sniggered evilly—the semblance of a laughter which held no joy. She stole back to the house—up the iron stairway—to her own room. Chained to the foot of her bed, the half bloodhound raised his heavy head, signifying a welcome by the thud of his tail on the floor.

“Good dog. Good Dlugoss,” she apostrophized him, “sleep yet a few moments—then later I will loose you.”

Again she quitted the room—passing silently in her heelless shoes across the landing to the unfurnished

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one arrogated to her own uses. Its walls were white-washed—its one window shrouded in a red baize curtain, its only furnishing a low bedstead with a small pillow and red baize quilt.

On the hearth a square iron plate still held a greasy film floating round a tiny wick, burning fitfully. A bucket nearby concealed its contents, but a faint odour of blood suggested remnants of a once living creature.

Noiselessly she stole to the low bed. What she saw there was indistinct—yet affording to her wisdom an awful satisfaction.

She sank on her knees—covering her partly veiled face with her knuckled hands.

The wick flickered.

Somewhere something rustled. A palpable movement stole like a whisper across the floor. Through the doorway—over the landing—down the iron stairway, a long grey shadow, gathering density in the wind-blown garden, the sickly light from the cloud-obscured moon baptizing it with the life of the night.

It moved. It raised its long, pointed snout to the heaving sky, snivelling a throaty welcome, then flitting through the partly opened door, it passed rapidly away between the trees—across the heath into the night.

Somewhere an angry farmer leaned over his small sheep-fold gazing at four ravaged ewes. His tailless

sheep-dog circled busily over certain tracks his nose advised him were important.

He approached his owner, voicing curtly his canine conjectures. The farmer regarded his antics as the source of information he could not divulge, nor he, the farmer, profit by.

“Found the devil’s scent,” he said bitterly—“oh aie, I believe that. But what’s the use of smelling the devil if we can’t catch him?”

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Had his prescience been as alert as his dog’s the resting-place of his enemy had revealed itself to his view across the bubbling river, skirting his homestead—behind the giant alders in the creek.

But the price of blood was not in his hand. Uselessly spilled upon the ground, it stank in his nostrils as a hundred shillings waste.

Not altogether unavenged. In crossing the river a forgotten whisky bottle rearing its jagged edges struck deep and true into the killer’s paw.

As the farmer brooded, heaping hot curses on the unknown murderer of his fine ewes, the murderer lay half lamed sucking at the disabling glass.

Meanwhile another injured stock-keeper, bewailing the fatal injuries to a valuable calf, determined to seek help. It was to Major Carruthers’s house he rode. Within an hour a posse of avengers were on the track of the much wanted destroyer. The scent was hot. The lurking killer, freed from the glass splinter, found himself the quarry of ten well-mounted men and half a dozen trained fox-hounds, eager for the chase.

As Major Carruthers had surmised, the track led straight towards The Spaniard's Inn—then past it—then to the long garden wall at Belit Place. The dawn broke as the hunt swept up. Distinctly he and the whipper-in saw the long-bodied killer, limping as though disabled, rush through the postern door. The shallow pitch of the lintel stopped the horses, but the dogs dashed after. Major Carruthers followed the dogs, drawing his revolver as he ran; for a brief moment he thought the chase was ended as three of the dogs flung themselves on to the quarry. To his horror, the animal, unmistakably a huge wolf, shook himself free, and scaling the iron stairway with incredible swiftness, disappeared into the house. The bewildered dogs circled uncertainly round the foot of the staircase.

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“Call ’em off, Woodrough,” shouted Carruthers—“for God’s sake, call ’em off—don’t let ’em get into the house.” So shouting he sprang up the steps. On the landing, outlined dimly in the half-light, a huge animal faced him. Without hesitation, Major Carruthers shot him down.

The next few moment never separated themselves clearly in his memory of that terrible morning.

A woman’s frenzied screams. The dying groans of the dog on the landing. For the animal he shot was a dog—the Polish hound belonging to the Countess Kritzulesco. Men and dogs crowding on to the landing. The hounds, after one disdainful sniff at their wounded brother breathing out his life, turned to the room



opposite the Polish maid's bedroom, bursting open the lightly latched door.

The indescribable horror of that entry—the eager dogs grouped round the low bed—sniffing, sniffing at the huddled body of Lycanthia—unconscious of the scene staged round her, gasping her life away under the distraught gaze of the six members of the South Belit Hunt.

Fiercer screams from the Countess's Polish maid—frenzied curses and anathemas hurled at him—steadied his whirling senses. He made no effort to ward off her despairing attack, conducted by teeth and nails tearing at his face, like a revolving nightmare, without reason or focus.

Then the house-servants came hurrying up—roused by the extraordinary commotion.

Major Carruthers forced himself into definite action when Miss Julia came on to the landing. She at all costs must be spared the frightful scene, whose meaning escaped his understanding.

He cleared the death-chamber of its bewildered occupants. The huntsmen and dogs stumbled down

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the iron stairway to a still more bewildered gathering in the winter-torn garden. One gentleman rode for a doctor. Another for the police. Major Carruthers found himself, in a wholly inexplicable way, seated on the floor of the landing, with the butler trying to push a potion of brandy between his lips.

“For God's sake, sir, drink it up. Don't you go off before you've told us what's happened.”

“Where’s Miss Julia?” was his reply.

“The women are looking after her. They have taken her downstairs.”

“Send for Lord Westhaughton at once. I’ll pull myself together in a moment”—he breathed heavily.

“Drink a drop more,” urged the butler, “’twon’t muddle you, ’twill steady you like. God help us all, what’s happened?”

The doctor arrived before the police. The dead dog was none of his business; he passed him by. The condition of the young Countess engaged his professional attention, without the, as yet, mysterious first cause being necessary for his diagnosis.

“She has been savagely bitten—savaged I suppose by her dog,” he said. “That throat wound tore her jugular vein. No chance to save her.”

He pursued his investigation.

“Injured in the foot, too,” he went on. “Cut, not a bite—” he straightened himself from bending over the body—“dead about an hour. What a frightful story.” He moved to the door from where Major Carruthers was dazedly watching.

“I’ll take a look at the dog.”

Carruthers turned, still leaning for support against the wall. The doctor raised the dog’s head.

“Strange,” he muttered—“not a trace of blood on his jaws”—he lifted the relaxed paws—“nor on his

feet—he hasn’t been out lately—his paws are dry and clean! Odd—very—”

He looked at Major Carruthers. "How did the young lady get savaged?"

"I know no more than you. I'll tell you all I do know."

Briefly he related the events of the night and early morning. The doctor listened; in common with the inhabitants of Hampstead, the exploits of the killer-dog were known to him. But he failed to connect the midnight murder with the dead dog on the landing. The condition of his coat and paws negated any night prowling.

"How did you come to shoot him?"

"I thought he was the wolf we were chasing."

This reply increased the doctor's mystification. If Dlugoss was not the culprit, where was the animal chased by the hunt?"

"Jove!" he ejaculated, "if your story is right, where is the brute? Hidden in the house? Rather awful that."

Hesitatingly he stood pondering what suggestion to make to the horror-stricken man, momentarily bereft of reasoning powers.

Up the stairs came Superintendent Taylor and a constable. Dr. Brenton thankfully handed over to him the official investigation of a case beyond his solution.

Nor did Major Carruthers's account of that night's adventure afford much information.

The killer had been again at work. The hounds had successfully followed him right up to Belit Place. Three of the hounds tackled him, getting him under for a fleeting moment. An examination of their jaws by the whipper-in showed their work had been grim, the ear of the oldest was badly torn—either by one of

the others or by the wolf; yet keen observation, even irrational credulity was baffled by the impossibility of believing the dead dog, Dlugoss, to be the animal.

Major Carruthers had shot him through the chest. He sank and died bleeding internally.

As each investigator satisfied himself that from all visible signs, the dead animal was not the culprit, the mystery deepened.

The forlorn, the ravaged figure on the bed, stirred the shocked men to the respect of immobility. For some moments they stood, endeavouring to understand by what foul means she had come by a violent death. Pillow and coverlet were soaked in the life-blood exuded from her torn throat. Yet by whose machination had the ruin been wrought?

The Superintendent recalled himself from realms of useless conjecture. Further search must be made in the only direction the killer could take—through the house.

The search was thorough. Even the three principal hounds were recalled to test the Superintendent's theory. They refused to take any interest beyond the death-chamber. So far—but no farther they followed the scent. Then they lagged, moving to the uncarpeted landing—then returning to the iron stairway.

"Where is Miss Lycanthia's nurse?" whispered the butler to Major Carruthers—"when we came up she was beside you, sir—in a fine taking on."

"The nurse? You mean the woman in black?"

"I just do. Does the Superintendent know of her?"

“Not from me.”

Major Carruthers slowly recovering from the horrible events of the morning, put a few questions to the police.

The Superintendent knew of Maga—from the inquiries he had made after the slaughtering of the

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horses, when examining Dlugoss for evidences of guilt. He did not immediately associate her with the present trouble.

“Where is the woman? Fetch her,” he instructed the constable.

The butler intervened—

“Beg pardon, Superintendent, but she should be in her own room.” He crossed the landing to the closed door. He tried the handle. The door was locked. Stepping authoritatively forward, the Superintendent knocked. There was no answer. Bending his head he listened. Nothing stirred.

“Come on, Ted,” he ordered, “put your shoulder against here.”

The door-panel yielded—broke—thrusting his hand through, he shot back a short iron bolt—the only fastening. Together the two men entered. Major Carruthers and the butler remaining on the landing.

Maga lay across the hearthrug—her right hand clutching a table knife, which she had used to end an existence of no further use.

The policemen stood and looked stolidly at the third tragedy at their feet. Then the Superintendent turned to Jason.

“Just see if the doctor is still in the house. He should see this—but she’s dead enough.” He looked at Carruthers leaning against the wall.

“What do you make of all this, sir?” he asked. “’Tis plain this one’s put an end to herself—she’s the nurse—probably after seeing her young lady done in. But how that girl got so fearfully mauled ain’t easy to explain—it was never done by the old hound.”

“You know all I know—but if I can be of no further use, I will get off now. You have some mystery to unravel.”

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By midday Lord Westhaughton reached Hampstead. Before seeing his cousin he interviewed the Superintendent, heard his account of the mysterious tragedy—very reluctantly viewed the now decently composed remains of the dead girl—a pallid shrunken semblance of her once alert young womanhood.

“A ghastly sight, Superintendent,” he said—“so few hours dead, and shrunk to skin and bone—all vitality drained away—she looks fifty—not yet eighteen. How on earth did it happen—or come to that, what did happen?”

“Quite a mystery about it, my lord. No one seems to know—and the maid who might have helped has killed herself.”

“No loss.”

The Superintendent caught the interjection—” No loss, my lord? Any information you can give will be of

assistance.”

“Just a prejudice—I never could stand the woman—a sly, creeping secretive person. We were hoping to get her back to Poland.”

The police officer pondered—

“Anyway, she can’t be suspected of killing the young lady. No woman could make that fearful throat wound. Those marks were made by teeth.”

“And you do not suspect the dead hound?”

“No, my lord, I do not. He hasn’t a mark on him anywhere. He can’t be the animal the hunt came after. Look at his paws—dry as a bone. Outside the roads are inches deep in mud—a fearful night of wind and rain! That dog ain’t what the hounds were after. Of course, that’s not to say he didn’t kill the young lady. But then again—his paws and face have no marks of blood—her throat was so torn, the dog that did it must have got himself bloody.”

“I suppose my cousin, Miss Mortimer-Beltane, need

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not remain here? She knows nothing of the affair beyond what her servants told her, and is so greatly upset I am anxious to get her down to Berkeley Square before the ghastly business of the inquest.”

“Quite right, my lord. When we searched the house for the mysterious animal, I saw her for a few moments. Miss Mortimer-Baltane has no evidence to give of any value. If anything fresh comes along, I can see her at Berkeley Square.”

Julia accepted in silence her cousin’s advice. The shock of that morning’s events stunned all collective

thought. Her personal maid proved equally bewildered. She, when following Miss Julia to the scene of the commotion had caught one glimpse of the inert, blood-stained figure on the low bed—graphic in suggestion.

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Miss Julia stayed at Berkeley Square until the sensational inquest was unsatisfactorily concluded.

The coroner and jury failed to formulate a verdict of explanatory value.

Then Lady Westhaughton accompanied her to Brighton, hoping to distract her thoughts from brooding on the terrible tragedy at Belit Place.

Except for a few hours in the late summer, Miss Julia never revisited Hampstead. The following winter the place was sold to a family ignorant of its associations with the mysterious calamity which drove its distracted owner from the home of her youth.

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The individual responsible for the violent death of the young Countess Kritzulesco escaped identification. The hasty shooting by Major Carruthers of the half wolf-hound was excusable under the circumstances. Yet the police, the doctor and the veterinary were

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unanimous in deciding the dog had no part in the inexplicable tragedy.

The suicide of the Polish maid excited neither commiseration nor surprise. Her jealous devotion to



her young mistress was sufficient motive. She was buried four hours after the conclusion of the inquest.

But Lycanthia's fate provoked a controversial excitement far beyond the confines of Hampstead. Yet it led to nothing definite. Surmises and conjectures were a crop of nettles which stung without reaction.

The taverns on the heath drove a roaring trade for three months, fostered by relays of inquiring pilgrims from London and more distant towns.

Lycanthia was buried in St. Mary's churchyard under the pained supervision of her cousin, Westhaughton, Lord Micheldowne and Count Felix Poninski. David Scrymgeour, wintering at Mentone with a tutor, heard of his cousin's death at the same time he heard of her burial, a month after it had taken place.

His letter to his mother contained the curious comment—"Bad luck for Cousin Julia to have it happen in her house, but—I don't know—there was something odd about Lycanthia. She knew more than she said. It wasn't what I wanted to know—I'm glad I don't know it. It was deuced unpleasant anyway."

Mrs. Scrymgeour sent the letter to Lord Westhaughton. He read it, grunted over its contents — then forgot it.

“There is method in man’s wickedness, it grows up by degrees.”

BEAUMONT.

“Life’s but a means unto an end, that end.

Beginning, mean, and end to all things—

God.”

P. J. BAILEY.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE END OF THE STORY

THREE months after Lycanthia Kritzulesco's death, Count Felix Polinski wrote to Lord Westhaughton—

*May I come and dine? I have much to say on a matter you did me the honour to discuss a few months ago.*

*My cousin, Oska Poninski, is in London on a business visit. To him I have related your family tragedy without breaking your confidence. The newspapers gave many details, which intrigued his interest.*

Westhaughton welcomed the opportunity. His English mentality, uninstructed in what he termed— “medieval mysteries,” gaped at the suggested outrage to his common sense beliefs.

He sent a note to Micheldowne asking him to be one of the party.

The four gentlemen assembled in the diningroom at Berkeley Square; dining without disturbing gastronomic functions by a discussion fraught with intangible excitements.

Over cigars and liqueurs, Count Felix introduced his cousin's theories on what had happened at Belit Place.

“I am emboldened by the confidence you honoured me with when my linguistic assistance was acquired in interviewing the Polish maid,” he began, deprecatingly—“be it understood neither my cousin nor I

are curious—for personal curiosity—but, believing we can throw some light on what really transpired, we place our services at your disposal.”

“My dear Poninski, to me, any reasonable explanation will be welcome. What the whole ghastly business has been about I cannot imagine.”

“These occult occurrences are a little out of your line,” said Micheldowne, “Shakespeare knew what he was about when he wrote there are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamed of in our philosophies. Committees and Bills in the Lords—Quarter Sessions and Committees in the Counties, turn a man’s mind to mundane facts. Something totally different is before us now. I imagine myself to be on the fringe of the mystery, but I would rather Count Oska put his conclusions into words.”

The young priest interposed—“Before going into particulars, may I request permission to be frank—quite frank? Even to the point of distressing suggestions?”

“Be as frank as you consider necessary. It’s the truth we are after in this deplorable affair.”

Micheldowne remarked gravely—“The truth may be otherwise than you suspect. I am prepared for surprises, by my ten years’ wanderings in the Dark Continent, where men and devils live cheek by jowl” —he looked keenly at the Count, quietly listening, yet obviously entrenched within the circle of his own knowledge.

The priest bowed.

“Then we will begin. I have a few questions to ask. My cousin has conveyed to me the facts I expected must exist. It is a recondite subject I am going to touch on, an ugly side of human nature.

“In Europe the term —‘lycanthropy’ conveys little meaning to the uninitiated. Among the peasants in

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Poland and Russia—‘shape-shifting’ is a recognized fact. The ancient Sagas of the Northern peoples contain a wealth of legends (not all accurate as to facts) concerning these dark practices. But underneath a mound of superstitions is a vast swamp of horrible truths.”

Micheldowne bent forward— “I expected you would take this view of what happened at Belit Place”—he said quietly—“these possibilities occurred to me, but I hesitated to put them into words. In England little is known of the origin of what is roughly termed ‘magic.’ In Africa the cult flourishes—diabolically so. There are secret societies given up to the practice of ‘shape-shifting.’ When it is genuine, as in five cases out of ten, I am convinced the procedure is the same.”

“And that procedure?”

“By the use of a medium. In biblical language— ‘a witch.’”

“Now Micheldowne, do you seriously expect me to believe in all this? Am I to suppose a witch has been causing all these horrors at Hampstead?”—Westhaughton’s tone was testy. He was conscious an irresistible surge of irascibility was rising between his common sense and his visitor’s beliefs.

“We are endeavouring to explain what really did happen”—Micheldowne fenced with a direct answer. “No offence meant, my dear fellow, but Felix and Count Oska and I have wandered further afield than these snug little islands of ours. My wanderings led me into, and through, strange places—possibly in regions where angels are described as—‘fearing to tread.’ Certain facts,

somewhat loosely described as —‘occult’ were forced upon my notice in India. It was there two members of The Society of Human Leopards obliged me to use methods not far short of

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bestial, to rescue a man and his daughter—however, that is another story.”

“I have not visited India, but I went with a mission to Benin. Ignorance, coupled with the blood lust, literally soaked the minds of those savages. The medicine men do certainly possess an active knowledge of demoniac cults, the average white man knows nothing about. Some are undoubtedly powerful mediums.” The priest spoke apologetically. Honesty compelled him to say further—

“I am also conversant with much of the secret mysteries of my own countrymen.”

“Do you, like my friend, Micheldowne, ask me to give credence to the notions, which to me seem fantastic, that my poor young cousin’s personal maid was a medium?”

Count Oska looked intently at the burning tip of his excellent cigar. For the moment its exquisite aroma was not appreciated. Slowly removing it from his mouth, he replied—

“No. I believe she was the instigator—the power behind the—the——” he paused—“I understand she brought the young Countess up—possibly she discovered her nursling possessed mediumistic qualities. These she developed.”

“I apologize, for what must seem to you my crass stupidity—but I do not see how this touches on my young cousin’s death.”

“I will endeavour to make that clear. Familiarity with the subject—makes for difficulties in explaining to one, like yourself, whose knowledge of the subject is so limited.”

“Less than limited, my dear sir, absolute ignorance is the term to use.”

The priest bowed.—“Doubtless an ignorance confined to this one side of human nature”

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“I don’t regret it—I don’t regret it,” hastily interrupted his host—“there is something about these old wives’ tales rather nauseating.”

“Yet they should not be ignored. There is a light side and a night side to the personality of every man and woman. It is the ‘night side’ from which we must guard ourselves.”

“I suppose you are suggesting a ‘night side’ to the happening at Belit Place.”

“Just so. I will explain. A real medium—and by that I mean—a person, generally a woman, who has a highly-developed psychic property of the mind, can see and hear things not discernible to, or by, ordinary persons. I must stress the term—‘*person*’.

“Personality belongs to the soul. Individuality to the spiritual. Personality dissolves after death. The spiritual Individual remains. A ‘person’ may possess astounding psychic qualities—the ability to range at will through those ‘principalities and kingdoms’ not found on earth and yet be as an ignorant infant in the higher realms of the spirit.

“The danger in developing psychic mediumship comes from over-development in the mental properties

of the soul, leading to the under-development— even the attrition of the individual spirit.

“A psychic medium has certain peculiarities highly developed. Once she abandons the reasoned balance of her mind to the unknown region of psychic adventure, she becomes a psychic automaton. Her physical body can be used either by her own sex emotions, externalized—or by a certain class of evil spirits. Here in London, not so long ago, one of your well-known scientists—Mr. William Crookes—had a great success in producing from the body of a medium, a young lady apparition, who called herself—‘Katie King’——”

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“Never heard of her.”

“It was an experience not discussed outside certain scientific research circles.”

“Deuced odd subject,” murmured Lord Westhaughton.

Count Oska bowed—“When first this particular subject arrested my curiosity I also adjudged it to be peculiar. A fuller understanding changed the course of my life.

“But may I continue? I understand the young Countess was the daughter of a man bitterly disappointed in a love affair.”

“You are right. That at least is a healthy kind of weakness.”

“The story is well known around Cracow. The young lady’s mother, a beautiful Englishwoman——”

“My cousin Pauline, in fact,” interrupted Westhaughton.

“——was unhappy. Her husband made no secret he had courted and wedded her, because she was the sister



of the woman he loved, but who had discouraged his advances——”

“That is quite correct. But how does this affect the horrible affair at Belit Place?”

“I suggest the young lady was born with the congenital unsatisfied psychic longings of both parents. Her mediumistic qualities were cultivated by her Polish nurse. This woman hated England—its social restraints—her isolation from her own race. She used the young Countess as an outlet for her own vicious tendencies.”

Lord Westhaughton poured out another liqueur of old brandy and sipped it slowly.

“Am I to understand, Count Oska, you believe my young cousin’s body was used in some way it should not be? This is rather beyond me.”

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“I ask you to review several facts. The country-side round Hampstead has been ravaged by a wolf. This wolf has been traced to Belit Place by several members of the fox-hunt. It was seen by at least six unbiased experienced men. They saw it pulled down by three of the fox-hounds—it escaped by fleeing up the iron staircase into the house. Who has seen the animal since?”

He paused—awaiting a reply.

“Go on, I pray.”—Westhaughton’s voice was hoarse.

“Your young cousin was found dying—or dead—her throat torn open—supposedly by dogs. Her half-blinded Polish hound was shot dead by one of the pursuing huntsmen in error for the fleeing wolf. Later, by unmistakable evidence, this Polish hound was cleared of all blame. If such a term can be used in connection with the animal. Two questions remain to be answered—

“Who killed the young Countess?

“Where is the wolf?”

“God alone knows,” muttered Westhaughton.

Mitcheldowne moved to a seat nearer his host.

“Westy, old man”—using a nickname bestowed in far-off Eton days,—“this may sound to you an outrageous suggestion, but on my soul I believe it to be the true one.

“That accursed Polish nurse knew that poor girl could either be used by an evil spirit, or else her emotional inheritance, from her extraordinary father, took form and energy, issuing forth as a ravening wolf.”

“By God!”—exclaimed Westhaughton, “I’ll not believe it. It’s a preposterous suggestion! *This* to happen in a Christian country!”

“So called Black Magic”—murmured Count Felix—“successful psychic mediumship is just that.”

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Lord Westhaughton exerted his sturdy English racial obstinacy in repelling an idea so abhorrent to his cultured beliefs.

“If”—he said impressively— “there is any truth—or even a degree of truth in what you say, the Government—the Home Office—should make the holding of stances illegal—send all the lot of those indulging in them to jail.”

“Agreed! But it can never be done. It is an evil instinct, deeply implanted in human nature. Power to indulge to the uttermost depths in the soul-destroying, fearful joy of Sensuality.” Micheldowne got up and strode restlessly up and down the room. “Don’t you agree?”—he asked the priest.

“I do. I am convinced those spiritistic stances are satanic in origin and result.

“The first recorded séance is that held in the Garden of Eden between Eve and Satan. The desire to Know. To Create. The Power which confers Wisdom.

“The knowledge seized against the Heavenly Warning became a satanic cult—culminating in the cataclysm of the Flood.

“In later ages—for a few centuries, its growth in the Western world was stemmed by the Light of Christianity. Now again Mankind is approaching the parting of the ways. The latter days are already fore-shadowed. A fresh outburst of rebellion is imminent on the spiritual plane. It will be sponsored by women. Satan works always through women. They are more approachable to his wiles than men. The men he leaves to the women. ‘Ye shall not suffer a witch to live’—was no malicious injunction. It was a warning, wrung from the fear-driven emotions of the ‘Far-seeing’—trembling for the evils fast coming upon the children of men.”

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Lord Westhaughton’s voice rose vehemently through the stunned silence in the room—

“I cannot believe it! Damn it!—I won’t!”— His voice sank to a growl! Unconvinced emotion— fighting against a reasoned possibility.

Micheldowne spoke—“None of us accept this thing willingly. The question is—can we reject it?”

“Anyone can reject anything,” retorted Westhaughton roughly, “especially when it touches one’s relations.”

The cousins stood up. “May we take our leave?” asked the priest. “The moment is painful. It may be we cannot usefully contribute further personal convictions as to the cause of the deplorable tragedy. We beg to offer our opinions with all diffidence.”

“Do not go, gentleman! Excuse my—well, what am I to say? Horrified disbelief? I cannot accept the suggestion that the body of a young girl can change into a wolf and go about the country——”

Westhaughton’s resentment gathered force from the vibrations of his own voice.

“That is not exactly what happens,” interposed Count Felix, “I have attended séances out of scientific curiosity. A certain number of interested persons assemble in a room. The medium, generally a women, goes either into an enclosed cupboard, curtained in front, or else remains among the ‘sitters’ —if such are all in sympathy with her—and appears to fall asleep. The room is darkened—the only light permitted coming from a shaded gas-jet or a lamp covered in a dark red cloth. This at least was the arrangement at the stances I attended.

“Provided the séance is genuine, and the necessary preparations correctly made, after a definite period—dependent on circumstances unnecessary to particularize, certain expected things happen.

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“All are due to the psychic powers of the medium.

“An oleaginous grey-white substance issues from the body of the medium, sometimes in the form of a rod—flexible or again, rigid. It can form into varied shapes—sinister, even physically dangerous to the sitters. It seems, under certain aspects, to act as a magnet to a similar emanation from the glands of the sitters. Its activities are productive of intense exhaustion for those persons affected.

“In spiritistic circles this substance is known as ectoplasm.

“Its principle is sensuality, pure animalism, issuing from the creative organs of the medium.

“It can be black in colour; generally it has no odour—but again it can have an unpleasant smell.

“One peculiarity it has. It can be readily dissipated by a sharp-edged instrument—such as a knife—a dagger—an open pair of scissors—or better still an axe with a sharp edge—or a sword.

“Fire or bullets do not affect its consistence.

“From the ectoplasm almost anything can materialize; the fierce emotions of the medium—or her etheric body—or her astral body—even her thought body. It is possible an evil entity can thrust its creative self into the ectoplasm—then the medium becomes possessed by an evil spirit.”

The earnestness of the speaker impressed Lord Westhaughton disagreeably. His expression of disgust heightened as he listened to—what in his mind he designated as—“beastly, devilish jargon Yet he could not seriously dispute the experiences of earnest men on a subject he admitted ignorance. Turning to Micheldowne he asked—

“What have you to say to this?”

Micheldowne shrugged his shoulders.

“Long familiarity with black magic practised by

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African tribes—and among natives in India—leaves me with an open mind. Do you ask me if I believe in the ectoplasm theory—my reply is—I do.

“There is a story of Indian magic of world-wide fame—I refer to the boy climbing up a rope and vanishing at the top. No sensible western person believes in it. Yet it has been done. The means used was an ectoplasmic rod

from a medium's body. The boy's figure a materialized thought-form from the medium's mind.

"No hypnotic suggestions were needed. It was all plain fact. The only mystery is men's ignorance of psychic possibilities. Knowing so much predisposes me to agree with Count Oska's theories as to what actually happened at Belit Place.

"Only the reappearance of the mysterious wolf could cast doubts on this diabolic theory.

"If Poninski is correct, the animal will not be seen again. It is three months since it was at Belit Place. If alive, where is it hidden? Every hunt in three counties has been on the watch. All the farmers and cottagers keep in touch with each other and with the police. Since that ghastly day it has not reappeared."

Westhaughton struggled with his personal ignorance opposed to facts.

"I still do not understand the beastly business. If Lycanthia was the medium and the wolf came out of her, how was she killed? She was found in a bed in the room next to her Polish maid."

"The wolf was seized by the dogs. It dissolved back into the ectoplasm, which re-entered the entranced body of the medium. But it was injured by the dogs. The repercussion destroyed the medium— as much by nervous shock as by actual wounds."

"My God! what devilish work!" interjected Lord Westhaughton. He got up from his chair; his legs

trembled. Leaning with both hands pressed palms down on the table, he said—

"Gentlemen, if your theory is correct, from the bottom of my soul, I thank God that unfortunate girl is dead." He

swayed slightly—then recovered himself. For a moment the other men kept silent—a pregnant silence which carried in it the echo of his prayer. Then Count Felix held out his hand—

“God be with us all,” he said, “and shield us and ours from the accursed cult.”

Westhaughton wrung it; intense feeling again swayed him as he stood—the priest pressed his host’s other hand.

“Be comforted,” he murmured, “for this, Christ paid the price of sin—to set men free. It is the misguided, headstrong souls who seek to enslave themselves past all redemption.”

The two cousins took their leave. An apathetic withdrawal after the devastating shock by the revelation of an horrific mystery. Westhaughton and Micheldowne went with them to the door, lingering for a few moments on the marble threshold, watching them as they strode away, their footfalls echoing on the flag-stones. The chill air from the aged trees in the garden souged as it touched the fanlight over the great door. In the dimly-lighted Square, the long wall of Lansdowne House stood out palely, as the two figures were outlined against it.

Then they passed into the night.

THE END

